MADAME X

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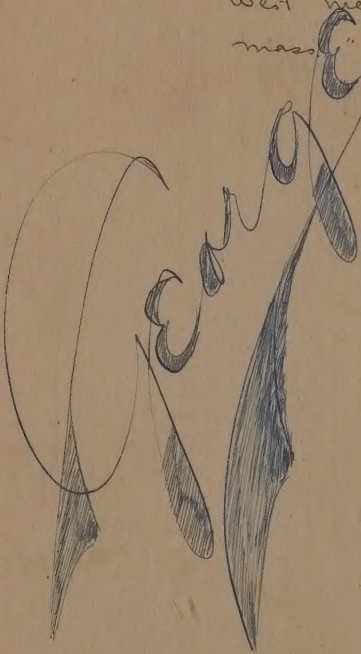

It's a man - really!
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A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *Madame X*

RUTH CHATTERTON PORTRAYING THE ROLE OF JACQUELINE

MADAME X

A STORY OF MOTHER-LOVE

BY

J. W. McCONAUGHY

FROM THE PLAY OF THE
SAME NAME BY
ALEXANDRE BISSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURE
STARRING RUTH CHATTERTON

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ÉLÉGIE

(*From the French of Massenet*)

Oh, Spring of days long ago, blooming and bright,
Far have you fluttered away!
No more the skies azure light, caroling birds
Waken and glisten for me!

Bearing all joy from my heart—Loved one!
How far from my life hast thou flown!
Vainly to me does the springtime return!

It brings thee never again—Dark is the sun!
Dead are the days of delight!
Cold is my heart and as dark as the grave!
Life is in vain—evermore!

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MADAME X

CHAPTER I

TWO INVALIDS

A night lamp—the chosen companion of illness, misery and murder—burned dimly on a little table in the midst of a grim array of bottles and boxes. In a big armchair between the table and the bed, and within easy reach of both, sat a young man. It was his fourteenth night in that chair and he leaned his head back against the cushions in an attitude of utter exhaustion. The hands rested on the arms with the palms turned up. But the strong, clean-cut face—that for two weeks had been a mask of fear and suffering—was transfigured with joy and thanksgiving when he reached over every few minutes and touched the forehead of the little boy in the bed. There was moisture under the dark curls and the fever flush had given way to the pallor of weakness.

Louis Floriot was a man with steel nerves and

an unbending will. Barely in his thirty-first year, he was Deputy Attorney of Paris, and in all the two weeks he had watched at the bedside of his boy he had not been ten seconds late at the opening of court in the morning. His work and his child were all that were left to him and he divided the day between them without a thought of himself. The woman that had made both dear to him was gone. He had loved the baby with almost more than a father's love because he was hers—theirs. He had slaved for fame and power to lay them at her feet as a proof of his love.

Two short years ago it would have been impossible to find a happier man within the girth of the seven seas. Then one night he had returned from his office too early—returned to find his life in ruins and his home made desolate. And she had fled from him into the night and had gone out of his life—but not out of his memory.

He had striven with all the strength of his will to forget her; but in his heart he knew that as long as he breathed her image would be there. He worked with feverish energy and poured his love out on Raymond. The child was with him every moment that he was not in court or in his office, but his dark curly hair and great dark eyes

were his mother's and forgetfulness did not lie that way.

In the two years that had passed since the whole scheme of his life had been shattered he had barely had time to piece together a make-shift plan that would give him an excuse for living. In this new plan Raymond was the one element of tenderness. But for his love for the boy he would have become as stern and inexorable as the laws in which he dealt. He could not tear Jacqueline out of his heart but he forced himself to remember only the bitterness of her perfidy.

In the past two weeks the memory had come back more bitterly. How different, he had thought in the long nights, if she had been there! They would have watched hand in hand and whispered hope and comfort to each other. One would have slept calmly when wearied, knowing that the tender love of the other guarded their baby. And what happiness would have been theirs that hour when the fever broke and Raymond passed from stupor to natural sleep! But she had not loved him—she had not even loved her boy; for she had deserted both.

Rose, the maid, who had been in their house since his marriage, softly opened the door and

whispered that Madame Varenne was in the library waiting to see him. He rose with a sigh, and after a last look at the sleeping child, tiptoed out of the room and noiselessly shut the door behind him.

Madame Varenne was a sprightly young widow, the sister of Dr. Chennel, who attended Raymond as if the boy were his own son. Madame Varenne, too, had almost a motherly affection for the child and something beyond admiration for the handsome, slightly grayed father. They supposed, as did everyone else in Passy, that Madame Floriot was dead. Floriot was living in Paris when she left him and he moved out to Passy shortly afterward.

He shook hands with her cordially as he came in.

"How kind of you to come, Madame Varenne!" he said, gratefully. The young woman looked up at him with a happy smile.

"I am delighted with the news that Rose has just given me!" she exclaimed, pressing his hand.

"Yes," he smiled wearily, "our nightmare is over and it was time it finished. I couldn't have held out much longer."

"You have had a bad time of it," she murmured, sympathetically.

"It hasn't been easy. And I shall never be able to thank your brother enough for what he has done for me," and Floriot's voice trembled.

"He has thought of nothing else beside the boy for weeks and he was always talking about him," declared Madame Varenne, shaking her head. "The day before yesterday he went to see one of his old professors to consult him on the treatment, and he was hard at work that night experimenting and reading."

Floriot nodded.

"He tells me that it was then that he got the idea which has saved Raymond's life. I owe my boy's life to your brother, Madame Varenne," he added, his voice vibrant with gratitude, "and you may be sure that I will never forget it."

"What he has done has been its own reward," she replied gently. "My brother is so fond of Raymond!"

Floriot smiled tenderly.

"And you?"

"Oh, I love the child!" she exclaimed.

"He loves you, too," Floriot assured her. "You were the first person he asked for when the fever

left him. And now, that we are alone for a moment I want to take the opportunity of thanking you from the bottom of my heart!"

"Thanking me! For what?"

"For your friendship."

"How absurd you are!" she laughed. "Then I ought to be making pretty speeches to you to thank you for yours as well!"

"It is not quite the same thing," returned Floriot. "You are a charming, happy, amiable and altogether delightful woman while I—— Well, I'm just a bear."

"You don't mean to say so!" she exclaimed, with a look of mock alarm.

"Oh, yes!" he nodded with a smile. "Bear is the only word that describes me—an ill-tempered bear, at that!"

"You will never be as disagreeable as my husband was!" And Madame Varenne shook her head decidedly. Floriot laughed.

"Really! Was he even gloomier than I?"

"My husband! Good gracious me! You are a regular devil of a chap compared to him!" exclaimed the sprightly lady, earnestly. Again Floriot burst into a laugh. It was the first exercise of the kind he had had in some time.

"You can't have amused yourself much," he suggested. "You can't have had a wildly merry time."

"I didn't!" was the forcible response. "But now everything and everybody appear charming by contrast!"

"Even I?" he smiled.

"Yes, even you!" she admitted, with another smile. At that moment her brother entered and Floriot greeted him affectionately. His first questions were about Raymond and the replies were satisfactory. He rubbed his hands enthusiastically and busied himself with his bag, while Floriot attempted to continue his speech of thanks in the face of protests from both.

"There, there, there!" broke in the doctor. "How do you know that we are not both of us sowing that we may reap? One never knows how useful it may be to be friends with a man in your profession," he chuckled.

Madame Varenne made her adieux and left with a rather wistful look at Floriot as she pressed his hand. She promised to come back the first thing in the morning.

"And now, friend Floriot," said the doctor, looking at him gravely, "as the boy is out of danger, you begin taking care of yourself."

Floriot stared at him in surprise.

"Why, there's nothing the matter with me!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, there is!" retorted the man of medicine. "And a great deal more than you think!"

"Nonsense!" said Floriot, lightly. "I'm a little tired, but a few days' rest will——"

"No, no, no!" interrupted the doctor, with an energetic shake of the head. "You are working too much and you are taking too little exercise. You brood and worry over things and you must take a cure!"

"What sort of a cure?" inquired Floriot, with an uneasy glance.

"Every morning, no matter what the weather is, you must take a smart two hours' walk."

"But, my dear fellow——"

"You must walk at a smart pace for two hours," insisted the doctor. "And you must feed heartily."

"My dear fellow, I can hardly get through a cutlet for my lunch!" protested Floriot.

"I will let you off to-day, but from to-morrow on you must eat two," he continued firmly, as if he had not heard the interruption. Considering

that luncheon was some eight hours in the past, this was not much of a concession.

"I shall never be able to do anything of the sort!" Floriot declared.

"Oh, yes, you will!" the doctor assured him with exasperating confidence. "On your way home every evening you must look in at the fencing school and fence for half-hour, take a cold shower and walk home."

"Walk! Out to Passy?"

"Out to Passy."

"My dear doctor," he smiled pityingly, "I can't possibly follow your prescription. I haven't the time."

"Then you must get married," returned the doctor calmly. Floriot gazed at him for a few moments in dumb amazement and then laughed amusedly.

"Distraction of some sort is absolutely necessary for your case," the doctor explained as gravely as a judge. "There is nothing to be startled at—you've been married before"—Floriot winced—"you can do so again. A lonely life is not the life for you. Look out for a happy-minded woman, who will keep you young and be a mother to your child, and marry her. I have an idea," he smiled

knowingly, "that you won't have much difficulty in finding the very woman!"

In a flash the young lawyer saw what was in his friend's mind. He saw, too, that he must make him a confidant—tell him a story that he had sworn should never be put into words. For almost a minute emotion held him tongue-tied.

Then he said brokenly:

"My friend, I see now that I ought to—I ought to have—told you before. I—am not a widower!"

Dr. Chennel fell back against the table astounded.

"Not a widower!" he gasped.

"My wife is living," said Floriot in a low, unsteady voice. "After three years of married life—she left me—with a lover. I came home unexpectedly one day—and found them—together. They rushed out of the house in terror. I should have killed them both, I think, if they had not run."

The doctor murmured something meant to be sympathetic. He was too much amazed for speech.

"I have sometimes thought of telling you, but, somehow, I could not talk of it. Chennel, old man!" he cried, miserably, laying his hand on

his friend's arm, "you can't guess how horribly unhappy I am!"

"Then—you—you love her still?" asked the doctor, gently. Floriot bowed his head to conceal the agony written on his face and threw up a hand in a gesture of despair.

"I can think of no other woman! God knows, I have tried hard to forget her! She was the whole joy of my life—my life itself! I cannot tell you how I suffered. I would have died if I had dared. But I thought of the child, and that saved me from suicide. I remembered my duty to the boy and the thought of it kept me alive. If I had lost him——" He choked and turned abruptly away.

"He will be running about in a week," said the doctor's quiet voice.

"Thanks to you, doctor, thanks to you!" he cried, his eyes shining with tears and gratitude as he turned to his friend with both hands outstretched. "You have saved both of our lives!"

They were gripping each other's hands hard when Rose appeared at the door to announce that Master Raymond was awake. Arm in arm they hurried off to the sick-room. Rose was about to follow a little later when she heard the buzz of the muffled door bell.

"It is Monsieur Noel," she thought as she hurried to the door. Noel Sauvrin, a life-long friend of Floriot's expected to reach the house in Passy from the south of France that night.

She opened the door with a smile of welcome that changed to a stare of frightened astonishment. There was a quick swish of skirt, a half-sob of "Rose!" a half-smothered exclamation of "Madame!" and a young woman threw herself into the maid's arms.

Jacqueline Floriot had returned.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN

Madame Floriot's face told its own story of remorse and suffering. The cheeks had lost their smooth, lovely contour and the dark clouds under the beautiful eyes spoke of nights spent in tears. The eyes themselves were now dilated as she gripped the maid's arms until she hurt her and gazed into her face with searching dread.

"My boy! Raymond!" she gasped, brokenly. "Is it true—has he been ill?"

The maid gently disengaged herself from the clinging arms and glanced uneasily at the library door. Madame Floriot followed the look and moved quickly forward as the maid answered:

"For more than two weeks, madame."

The woman timidly pushed the door open and stepped into the library. She gave a quick gasp of relief when she saw that the room was empty.

"I only heard of—it—yesterday—by accident,"

she half-whispered, her hand at her throat. Then as the memory of the hours of grief and dread swept over her she cried:

"Rose, I must see him!"

The maid looked her alarm.

"Monsieur Floriot is with him, madame!"

"Ah—h!" she stifled a sob.

"Poor little chap!" said Rose, tenderly. "We thought he could never get over it!"

The tortured mother sank into a chair with a moan of anguish.

"But the danger is over now," continued Rose, gently. "The doctor says he will soon be well again."

Jacqueline's eyes fell on a photograph of the boy on the table beside her and she seized it with both hands and held it to her face.

"My Raymond! My laddie!" she sobbed, softly. "How he has grown! How big—and strong—he looks!"

"He does not look strong now, madame," and Rose shook her head.

"To think—that he might have died! And I should never have seen him again! My darling, my little laddie!" The face of the picture was wet with tears and kisses. "I wonder if he will

recognize me! Does he remember me at all?" she cried eagerly.

The maid gave a start and an exclamation of alarm.

"Here's Monsieur Floriot!"

Jacqueline rose unsteadily with a smothered cry and all but reeled toward the door. In a moment Rose's arm was around her.

"No, no!" she whispered, reassuringly. "I was mistaken! I thought I heard him coming."

The woman stood with both hands pressed to her breast and Rose watched her pityingly. She had loved her young mistress dearly and had seen much in her short married life to which both husband and wife had been blind. It was several moments before Jacqueline had sufficiently recovered from the shock to speak.

"How—my heart—beats!" she panted. And then after another pause: "What—will he say—to me? But I don't care—I don't care what he says if he will only pardon me enough to let me stay here with my boy. If he—if he refuses to see me—I don't know what will happen to me! Rose! Rose!" she cried, piteously, sobbing on the maid's shoulder, "I—I am afraid!"

Rose patted her shoulder and murmured sym-

pathy until the sobs became less violent. Then she suggested gently:

"Wouldn't it be better to write to Monsieur Floriot, madame? He does—he doesn't expect you and—you know how quick-tempered he is."

"I have written to him! I have written three letters in the last three weeks and he has not answered them."

"He didn't open them," said Rose, very low.

There was another convulsive sob and then Jacqueline straightened and threw back her head, her eyes shining with feverish resolve.

"I *must* see him! I *will* see him!" she cried in a high, unnatural voice. "He cannot—he *must* not condemn me unheard! He loved me a little once—he must hear me now! Does he ever speak of me?"

The maid sadly shook her head.

"Never, madame."

"Never!" she echoed faintly.

"No, madame."

Jacqueline turned away for a moment with a sob of despair.

"What did he say—what did he do when I—left? Do you remember?"

Rose shuddered at the recollection.

"I shall never forget it! He was like a madman! He shut himself up in his room for days together and wouldn't see anyone. Once he went out and was gone for twenty-four hours. I used to listen outside his door and I heard him sobbing and crying. I was so frightened once that in spite of his orders I went into his room. It was in the evening and he was sitting by the fire burning your letters and photographs and the tears were rolling down his cheeks!"

Jacqueline listened white-faced, and as Rose told the story of her husband's grief a sudden gleam of hope made her dizzy and faint. He had loved her deeply, after all! He must still love her a little! She had not lost everything!

"The boy saved his brain, I think," Rose was saying, but she barely heard her. "He never would let him leave him, night or day. Then he began to calm down a little and seemed to settle to his work again. He has worked a little harder than before—that's all. Then we moved out here," she added.

Jacqueline turned to her and she was more nearly calm than she had been at any moment since entering the house.

"Rose, I must see him!" she cried, determin-

edly. "Go and tell him that a lady wants to speak to him, but do not let him guess who it is!"

"Ah, but——"

"Rose, I beg of you!"

The maid shook her head doubtfully and then with a sigh of resignation went out to carry the message. Jacqueline, her knees trembling, dropped weakly into a chair and strove to compose herself for the terrible interview to come. In returning she had had no hope of forgiveness, for she had not believed that her husband had ever truly loved her. But now that she had gained hope from Rose's story of his grief her emotions were beyond control.

There was no natural vice in her, and for that reason she had walked in the purgatory of the fallen who are still permitted to see themselves with the eyes of the virtuous. Vice breeds callousness. She had been gay, witty, laughter-loving and emotional. Without love, as she understood it, she felt herself to be incomplete. She had worshipped her husband, but at last had come to believe that she was giving far more than she received. She never knew the heart of the silent, serious, hard-working man. Her vanity was hurt,

and through her vanity she fell—to be driven away from her husband and her boy.

Her boy! For two years she had thought of little else, had dreamed of nothing else but the hour when she would be permitted to hold him to her breast. Surely, even the stern attorney who had loved her once would not deny her the mother's right to be with her child in his illness! He must permit her to live where she could see her boy sometimes and watch him grow to manhood!

She picked up the photograph and kissed it passionately again and again.

"Oh, my darling, my dear one! My laddie!" she half sobbed. "If it were not for you I——"

A door facing her opened softly and her husband stepped into the room!

CHAPTER III

MAGDALEN

Floriot did not recognize her as he entered. She was rising and her head was bowed. He turned slowly with hand still on the knob of the door and their eyes met! Every muscle in his body grew rigid and the pallor of his face, born of his long nights in the chair by his boy's bed, changed slowly to a pasty, sickly white. The woman gazed at him with heaving bosom and hope and dread in her eyes.

"You——!" he choked. Jacqueline timidly took a half step toward him, and clasped her hands.

"Yes—I. I——," she began fearfully, but the sound of her voice galvanized the statue at the door.

"Leave this house!" he commanded sternly and he advanced firmly into the room.

"Louis! I——"

"Leave this house at once!" he interrupted, his voice rising with his anger.

"Listen, Louis, please! I——"

"Go! Do you hear me!" he cried furiously as he stalked past her, opened the door into the hall, and held it for her to pass out. Jacqueline crept toward him looking up with frightened, tear-stained face.

"Yes, yes! I will go, I will go!" she panted hurriedly. "I—I promise I will go right away! But, please, Louis, listen—one moment, *please!*"

He looked at the crouching, pleading figure and the anger in his face gave way to an expression as indescribable as unforgettable, and he sharply turned away.

"Well, what is it then? Be quick! What do you want?" he demanded roughly.

She sank to her knees and raised her hands to him in piteous appeal.

"Louis, forgive me! For——"

"What!" His voice startled her like a pistol shot. But she stammered on:

"Forgive me, Louis, so——"

He slammed the door and in two strides was standing over with clenched fists. She could not meet his furious eyes and her head bowed almost to his feet.

"Forgive you! Forgive you!" and he laughed a

short, bitter laugh that was more terrible and hope-destroying than curses would have been to the crouching woman. "For two years I have lived day and night with the thought of you in another man's arms and your kisses on his lips! And you ask me to forgive you! You——"

"Louis! Louis!" she moaned. "In our child's name——"

"Stop!" he broke in sternly. "Don't dare to mention him! He is nothing to you and you are nothing to him! He is mine—mine only! Did you think of him when you left us?"

"Louis, for God's sake! I was mad! I was——"

"Oh, of course!" his harsh laugh grated in again. "That is about what I expected." Then his face hardened and he lashed her with his scorn.

"I was false to my husband. I deserted my child—I was mad! I stole out of my home like a thief and took all of its happiness with me—I was mad! I went away with my lover to what I believed would be a life of pleasure—I was mad! I trampled on every——"

"Louis! Louis!" she sobbed, and writhed at his feet. "It's the truth! I was mad! I——"

"The truth! Hah! Would you like to hear the

truth? You were tired of being an honorable woman—a pure mother! You were tired of me and loved—him! That's the truth! You loved him, didn't you? You loved him!"

"He loved me! He said he would kill himself for me! And I——"

"And you believed him! You never thought of me and I"— for a moment grief conquered anger and his voice broke—"I worshipped you! And ours was a love match," he went on bitterly, "for you told me once a thousand years ago that you loved me!"

His face worked, in a spasm of anguish, and he tried to move away, but the woman clutched a leg of his trousers with both hands and lifted her head suddenly.

"And it was—it is true, Louis!" she cried desperately.

His look was more than answer enough.

"It is! It is, Louis!" she pleaded feverishly. "We didn't understand each other, that's all! It was my fault, my fault! You loved me passionately but I did not know it! I could not see it! And you made me only part of your home—never part of your life! I was never your friend—you were gentle with me, but you never took me into

your life—you never really knew my heart, and with you I always felt alone. I loved you but"—she fought for breath and coherence—"but I was always afraid of you—you were so serious and severe! I wanted to laugh and have a good time. You never noticed it—you had your work, your ambitions, your legal friends and I—had nothing! Nothing!" she sobbed. "And I was so young—twenty! Hardly twenty! Oh, Louis, forgive me! Forgive me!"

Floriot half staggered to a chair and sank into it. The unexpectedness of the soul-wracking scene coming on top of the strain of his two weeks' vigil in the sick-room was almost too much for even his iron nerve. Jacqueline, huddled on the floor, was sobbing convulsively. He buried his face in his hands and groaned. At the sound she struggled to her feet and took a step toward him, gasping to control her heaving bosom. He waved a hand toward the door without raising his head.

"Louis!" she cried passionately, desperately, "you would not condemn the lowest criminal if there were any defense for him, and I am the mother of your boy! It is all my fault, but you could have helped me if you would! You swore to love, honor and protect me, and did you do it?

You loved me but you never honored me! You did not think I was worthy to be the companion to you that a wife should be! You looked for companionship to your friends. I might as well have been your mistress! Did you protect me? You brought *him* to the house the first time? You said he was your friend and you encouraged me to be kind to him. You permitted him to be my escort wherever I wanted to go, because my pleasure would not then interfere with your work or your plans!"

She choked. Floriot did not stir.

"He grew to be everything to me that you should have been. He sympathized with me in everything! He anticipated every thought and desire! You would not even make an effort to please me if my request interfered with your work —always your work!"

"Life of pleasure!" she quoted bitterly. "Louis, I never loved him! You angered me and hurt me because you would not let me come close to your real life. And I—I—Louis, I was mad! But you could have saved me! A little attention—if I could have felt that I was anything more than a plaything—something to amuse you in the few minutes that you ever took for amusement—Louis,

you will never know how I fought with myself—the torture of those days—and when I came to you for help——!" The words died away in a sob. There was no sound from the husband but the labor of his breathing.

"Do you remember a few days before—before—I—the night I—left—I wanted you to go to Fontainebleau with me and you wouldn't? And I went with—him! That day in the park he—kissed my hands—and the lace of my dress—and said he would kill himself at my feet if I didn't love him——!" She stopped with a gasp and went on, bringing the words out in broken phrases.

"I made him take me home—I was running from him—from myself—to you! I found you in your study and begged you—to go out with me! I wanted to—show myself—that I loved you only! Do you remember what you said? 'I'm too busy. Run along—and get Lescelles to take you!' "

"Oh, Louis, Louis!" she cried, throwing herself at his feet, while the storm of weeping shook her again, "you could have saved me then!"

Still the bowed figure in the chair did not stir. He was so numbed that his consciousness seemed to be that of another—watching, listening and judging. He was the type of man whom Duty,

once embraced, grips with hug like the Iron Maiden's, and even gains a monstrous pleasure as life itself or all that makes life worth while is slowly crushed out. Had she come a month before this scene would have left him unshaken, but now——!

His boy—their boy—lay up-stairs, saved from death by a miracle. Her clasped hands rested on one of his knees and her head touched his arms. His eyes were closed, but he nearly swooned when he breathed the perfume of her hair that brought back the picture of a dark head on the white pillow in the dim moonlight or the gray of dawn.

Then came the terrible thought that for two years that picture had been the joy of another. . . . Fragments of his talk with Madame Varenne flashed through his mind. Was there a little fault on his side? . . . He need not speak a word. He had but to open his eyes and look forgiveness and her warm body would be pressed again to his breast, her soft arms would be around his neck and her soft lips would shower kisses on his face. . . . He drew a sharp breath and rose slowly and uncertainly.

"Jacqueline!" he said in an unsteady voice, not

daring to let his wavering eyes look down. "Jacqueline, you must go!"

A long, convulsive sob and:

"Ah, why did I go at all? Why did I ever go?" she moaned. "You would have killed me and that would have been the end of it! Louis, forgive me! Forgive me!" And she clasped his limp hand in both of hers and looked up piteously.

"No! No!" he cried, fighting desperately with an impulse to stoop and crush the slender body in his arms and kiss the tears from the upturned face. "Surely, you see that I——"

"What will become of me?" she pleaded, as her instinct told her that he was weakening.

"Go back to him! Go back to the man who would have killed himself for you!" he cried in a voice that he tried in vain to make as bitter as the words. And he made no effort to free his hand. The answer was a barely audible whisper:

"He is dead!"

Floriot jerked his hand away with an exclamation of horror and sprang back, his eyes flashing with anger.

"So that is why you've come back!" he blazed furiously.

"No! No!" she protested, frightened, struggling

to her feet with arms outstretched. "I came to see our boy—our Raymond! To beg you—to——"

The flaming scorn in his eyes stopped her.

"And I was on the point of yielding!" His laugh made the woman wince. "What a fool I was! I actually believed you! So he is dead, is he?"

She bowed her head in utter despair.

"I wrote—to tell you."

"And now that he is dead you thought of me again—of me, of your idiot of a husband"—his voice rose with fury—"the simple-minded fool who would be only too glad to take you back again!"

"Louis, I love you—I wanted to see you, to see our child again! Can't you see I've changed?" she pleaded. She threw open her arms and tears ran unheeded down her face.

"Changed! Hah!—Leave the house!" and he pointed imperiously to the door.

"Louis, it's true! Let me see our boy again!"

"He has forgotten you!"

"Let me kiss him—just once!" she begged.

"He believes you to be dead!" he said, with cold cruelty. The mother rushed to him with half-stifled shriek and terror in her face.

"Louis! No! No!" she screamed, "No! No! No!"

"He does!"

"Louis, no! Don't say that!" Horror was driving her to hysteria. "It can't be true! You wouldn't tell him that! Louis, you loved me once! You loved me! It's not possible! I am your wife—his mother! His mother!"

Floriot eyed her, cold and unmoved.

"You have gone out of his life and mine," he replied calmly. Jacqueline moaning, sank to the floor.

"Oh, my God!" she prayed. "Help me! Help me! Louis, be kind to me! A life of repentance——"

He pulled her roughly to her feet and half-carried her toward the door.

"Don't take my child away from me!" she panted, struggling.

"Go! Leave the house!"

"Oh! Let me see him! I won't—speak! Let me kiss him! I won't—say a word!" she gasped as they reached the door and he pushed her violently through into the hall.

"Louis! Pity—! Raymond! My child, my——"

The slam of the door cut off the sound of the

pleading voice from his ears. He held the knob to prevent her from reopening it. For a few moments there was silence. Then Floriot heard through the door something between a choke and a sob and the quickly receding rustle of skirts. The bang of the outside door echoed through the silent house.

CHAPTER IV

OPENING FOR THE DEFENSE

For more than a minute Floriot stood motionless, but now he was leaning his weight on the hand that held the knob. He listened—half-hoping, half-fearing that he would hear her at the outside door—and then staggered across the room and collapsed into the chair where she had sat, lying with arms and head on the table above the photograph that Jacqueline had kissed. He had won—but to know that he would have found happiness in defeat.

"God!" he groaned aloud. "She's gone! She's gone! And I love her! I love her! And I shall never see her again! She must never see Raymond! Her influence would be—— No!" he cried, as if fighting something within himself. "She must never come back. God give me strength to forget!" he prayed in anguish. "Let me forget! Let me forget!"

There was a sound of someone at the door lead-

ing to the stairway, and he barely had time to wipe the moisture from his forehead and half-compose himself before Dr. Chennel swung breezily into the room.

"He's doing splendidly!" cried the doctor with a cheery smile. "And he's hungry—the best sign in the world! I have left my orders with the nurses." He began packing his little bag on a side table. "He's to have a little milk and three spoonfuls of soup before he goes to sleep and nothing else until I come again in—— Why, what's the matter?" he cried in alarm, hurrying over to his friend as he caught a glimpse of his face. "Are you ill?"

Floriot straightened up and put out his hand. His face was lined and livid and his eyes were wild with grief.

"My dear—doctor!" he said, brokenly, "I have just gone through—the most awful fifteen minutes of my life. My—my wife—has been here!"

"Your wife!" The doctor fell back a step and stared at him. Floriot buried his face in his handkerchief.

"Yes, she has—just gone! You can imagine—how I felt. No, you can't!" he cried, bitterly, springing up with clenched fists. "For a moment

I was afraid of myself—afraid that I would kill her!"

Dr. Chennel watched the writhing face in silence as Floriot paced wildly up and down the room.

"Doctor, in these few minutes—I have lived five years over again! All the joy, all the miseries, all my love, all her——"

The other stopped him with a gentle touch on the arm.

"Floriot, my friend," he said quietly, "sit down a moment and try to get hold of yourself."

The calm strong voice of the physician had the effect that he desired. Floriot's shoulders squared and his voice grew firm.

"You're right, Doctor. I will forget all about it! Do you know why she came back?" he added bitterly. "Her lover is dead!"

Rose opened the hall door.

"Monsieur Noel has come, sir!"

Floriot nodded.

"Show him in here, Rose," he said quietly and turned to Dr. Chennel. "Noel is an old and very dear friend whom I thought dead until this morning," he explained. "Poor chap! He and I——"

A well-set-up young man—apparently several

years younger than Floriot, though his hair was more heavily grayed—entered the library with a springy step and cheery call of:

"Well, here I am! And very much alive!"

His blue eyes were smiling and his white teeth gleamed in the lamplight but his face bore the marks of storms that sweep the soul. And on his right temple was visible the end of a large scar that extended up under the hair.

"My dear old Noel!" exclaimed Floriot, hurrying to meet him with both hands extended. The friends stood with their hands locked and looked each other over with the affection mixed with curiosity that may be marked when two who have been as brothers meet after a long separation.

"This is my friend, Dr. Chennel," said Floriot, turning at last. "Shake hands with him, old man! He has just saved my boy's life!"

"Then I'm more than glad to shake you by the hand, Doctor," said Noel, gracefully, as he took the doctor's fingers in his. "For anything that touches Floriot comes very near to me!"

The doctor bowed his appreciation and Floriot, who had never taken his eyes off his friend, remarked with a smile:

"You look in very good health for a dead man."

Noel turned and asked with whimsical surprise:

"Then you heard of my suicide?"

"Yes," returned his friend gravely, "and the papers said you were dead."

"In the words of a great American humorist," laughed Noel, "'The report was greatly exaggerated!'"

"Two bullets, they said."

"Yes, and they were right," nodded the "suicide," brightly. "But two bullets were not enough for me. I've always been a bit hard-headed, you know, though one of the doctors had another explanation."

The other two looked at him inquiringly, particularly Dr. Chennel, who was prepared to combat any heretical theory.

"When I was on the highway to recovery," resumed Noel, "one of the doctors told me that he didn't think that I would ever get to be marksman enough to hit my brain. Said I ought to practise trying to hit a pea in a wine barrel before I tried it again. Then I found out I could laugh," and he burst into one to prove it, "and decided that as long as I could take enough interest in life to laugh there was no occasion for my going on with my suicide plans."

Dr. Chennel and Floriot joined in the laugh with considerable restraint and the former felt that he was the "undesirable third."

"Well, I must be going," he said, gathering up his hat and bag and shaking hands with both the friends. "You have a good deal to tell each other. I'll be back in the morning," he added to Floriot. Then with many injunctions about the medicine and food he departed.

"And now," said Noel, putting a hand affectionately on each shoulder and holding his friend off at arm's length, "let me have a look at you, Louis, old man!" He paused and gravely scrutinized the smiling face. "Life has not been much kinder to you than to me, judging from your looks," he said at last. The hands fell and he turned away.

"Find me looking old, do you?"

"No, not old for your age," smiled Noel. "How old are you—forty?"

"Thirty-five!" protested Floriot.

"Well, nobody would say that you were a day more than forty-two!" his friend gravely assured him.

"Thank you!" was the ironic response, and they smiled into each other's eyes.

"Fancy! Five whole years since I saw you!"

"And five weeks' separation, in the old days, seemed a century!"

"You're going to stay here all night and take breakfast with me in the morning."

"Most assuredly."

"An early breakfast, though," Floriot smiled a warning. "I have to be in court at nine."

"Ah, of course!" nodded his friend. "You're Deputy Attorney now."

"Yes, I received my promotion more than a year ago."

"I always knew you'd get on!" exclaimed Noel, patting his shoulder.

Floriot turned away with a sigh.

"I have not much to worry about there," he said, without enthusiasm. "But, I want to hear about you, old man! What happened to you? Why did you want to commit suicide. Who was she?"

Noel threw him a quick, searching glance.

"It *was* a woman," he nodded.

"Of course it was! For some time before you went away I noticed a change in you."

Again there was the sharp look.

"Ah, you did, did you?"

"Yes, you were not as jolly and lively as you had been before," Floriot continued gently. "And you used to be away for days at a time; so I knew it must be a woman. You loved her?"

A long steady gaze answered him.

"And she was false to you?"

"She did not even know I loved her!" was the low response.

"Didn't you tell her?" asked Floriot, surprised.

"No!"

"Why?" he persisted with freedom of a friend. "Was she free?"

"She loved another man," replied Noel. There was not a tremor in his voice but he stood very still and did not meet his friend's questioning eyes. "When I heard of her marriage I felt that my life was of no particular use to me. So," with a shrug of the shoulders, "I tried to get rid of it—and failed. Ridiculous, eh?"

Floriot laid his hand on his friend's arm. The grip of the fingers told his unspoken sympathy.

"Oh, I am used to being a fool!" declared Noel, lightly, but with a sub-current of bitterness in his voice. "I was the fool of the family at home and one of the best jokes they ever had at school. I might have known that the woman I loved would

have sense enough to pick out another man. I even made a fool of myself when I tried to take my life!"

"But you were badly hurt?"

"Pretty badly," replied Noel gravely; "but I was soon on my feet again. Then," the shrug again, "having nothing on earth to live for but an occasional laugh—which doesn't cost much—I made a ridiculous amount of money in the Canadian fur business."

"But, why didn't you write to me?" demanded Floriot, reproachfully. Noel turned to him apologetically.

"I wanted to forget and to be forgotten, old man," he said. "The papers reported me dead, and the fact that I didn't die didn't seem to interest them, so I seized the opportunity to stay dead until it suited my pleasure to come to life again."

"Are you married?"

"No!" was the emphatic reply. "I shall never marry!"

"So you still love her?"

Noel made an impatient movement.

"I don't want anyone else!" he answered, curtly. "Besides, I'm too old to think of marrying now

Let's talk about you, Louis. Are you happy? How is Jacqueline? Little Jennie Wren, we used to call her," he went on with a tenderly reminiscent smile. "What a pretty, lively little thing she was! I suppose she's more quiet now after five years with a solemn old crank like you. Why, Louis! What's the matter?"

Floriot had sunk into an armchair, his face white and drawn. In two strides his friend was beside him, bending over him in alarm.

"Don't—don't worry! It's nothing—nothing!" said Floriot unsteadily. "My child has been at death's door—for the last few days and I thought —I—had lost him. My nerves are just a little—out of joint. That's all!"

"My dear old chap!" cried Noel anxiously, "the boy is all right now?"

"Yes, Raymond's out of danger now." There was a long pause and then in altered tones Noel asked.

"And how old is this Monsieur Raymond?"

"Four."

"Quite a man. Is he your only child?" There was a curious strained quality in his voice. Floriot nodded.

"I will see him, of course?"

Floriot wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and returned it to his pocket. Then he replied more calmly.

"Certainly! In the morning. He can't be disturbed to-night."

There was another long pause broken by Noel.

"Don't tell your wife I'm here," he said. "I want to see her face when she comes in and sees me!" He walked slowly across the room with his back to his friend.

"You—won't see her," was the low reply. Noel turned quickly.

"Oh, she's away?"

Floriot leaned forward, his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands.

"Yes, she's—gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Noel in bewildered astonishment.

Floriot rose and lurched a step or two away. Noel could see less than his profile and barely caught the words, but they were enough to leave him momentarily tongue-tied and paralyzed with amazement.

"She left me—two years ago—with her lover!"

Noel stared at him, dumb with amazement, and stammered something incoherently, of which

Floriot could catch only the words, "little Jennie Wren!" in tones of pity. He wheeled on him.

"You pity *her!*"

Noel raised his eyebrows and looked calmly at his friend.

"Is she not to be pitied most?" he asked gently.

"Do you think so?" cried Floriot bitterly. "Then, what of me who adored her—and whose life she wrecked? I am an old man at thirty-five! You told me so, yourself! Now, you know why!"

The other half raised his hand and murmured something sympathetic.

"You can never imagine what these last two years have been to me!" Floriot's voice was hoarse with anguish. "I have been torn with jealousy and dreams of vengeance and tortured almost beyond endurance by the memory of the happiness I have lost!" He dropped, shuddering, into a chair, his handkerchief pressed to his face. Noel gazed at him in pitying silence for several minutes. Then he spoke as gently as before.

"And yet, she was not wicked," he said, and Floriot writhed. "She was only frivolous and wanted luxury and pleasure. Life was too serious a problem for her. And you never suspected anything?"

"No!" groaned the figure in the chair. "I loved her and believed in her."

Noel walked over and put his arm affectionately across his friend's bowed shoulders.

"My dear old man, brace up!" he said, with not quite enough cheerfulness to grate. "Remember you have your boy still and—who knows? One of these days, perhaps, she'll be bitterly sorry for the misery she has caused, and you'll see her here again, asking——"

"I have seen her again!"

"She came back then?" asked Noel, dropping back, startled, as Floriot sprang up, his face blazing with anger again.

"This very day she had the impudence——"

"She came back?" repeated Noel's quiet voice, insistently. "And for what?"

"Oh, not for much!" replied Floriot with bitter irony. "Merely to ask my pardon, and to ask me to take her back into my house—in her old place, between my son and myself!"

"And what did you say?" The gentle voice and mild blue eyes were turning hard and metallic.

"I told her to go!"

"You turned her out?"

"Turned her out! Of course, I did!" And he

stared in astonishment at his friend's set face and narrowed eyes.

"Floriot!" said Noel, sternly, "you have made a mistake! You turned her out in the street without knowing where she was going! My friend, unless I'm badly mistaken myself, you'll be sorry for this in the morning!"

Floriot stood dumbly for a moment, twice began to speak, and then with a gesture of despair turned away. Noel watched him in silence. Presently he wheeled again, his face calm with some sudden resolve. The pain was in his eyes.

"Will you sit down, old man?" he said, quietly. "I want to tell you something."

CHAPTER V

CONTINUING FOR THE PROSECUTION

When Floriot swore that the story of the wreck of his life should never be told until Judgment Day he did not know that the only man to whom he could possibly have poured out his grief was alive, and he could not foresee that one day he would be so near to collapse that he would be forced to seek the relief of confession. It is rarely that high-strung, sensitive men can put into words such a story as that which Floriot was about to confide to his friend. That is why they call upon the gunsmith instead of the divorce court for aid in "cleansing their honor."

But now the need of counsel and comfort was strong upon him. Noel's refusal to agree with him, coming with the recollection of his own wavering before his pleading wife, shook his faith in himself. He was willing to live again the terrible drama of his wrongs, and his grief to harden his bitter resolution and make a sure ally of Noel.

The latter, when he was invited to sit down and listen, looked uncertainly at his friend's drawn face for a moment and then slowly settled back in the big chair, shading his eyes with his hands, until the other could barely tell whether they were open or closed. Floriot did not sit. He paced slowly up and down the room in silence as if preparing himself for the ordeal; and then he began.

"Noel, my friend," he said, in low steady tones, "there is no man—or woman—alive excepting you, to whom I could talk as I'm going to do. I have no one left in the world but you and my boy and, God knows, I need both of you—if there is a God," he added bitterly.

"You were about to defend her just now without question. You said that she was most to be pitied. I know why—you knew her before she was married. That was five years ago. Marriage develops people"—there was the bitter note again—"and she developed into a woman that you never knew and never dreamed could live in the same body with her. She had the happiness of a home and the life's happiness of two—and possibly three—persons in her hands. For the sake of a vicious intrigue which she now sees could never bring her anything but misery, she sacrificed her

boy and me. And there is no consolation for me in the thought that she was caught in the ruins of the home that she pulled down!"

Noel stirred in his chair but did not speak. In spite of his breezy humor and love of light conversation he had been blessed with the divine power of silence.

"Her misery is no consolation to me," Floriot went on, his voice trembling slightly, because I—I—old man, I still love her! And she loved me—for a year! Oh, Noel, that is the worst of the hell that I have lived in for two years! She loved me—for a year!"

He paused in his walk and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. Noel watched him silently.

"But I am not weak enough nor cowardly enough to let that weigh with me. The boy must be protected. He must never know that she is alive—never know what she did." He seemed to be talking more to himself than to his friend. "If she came back there is no knowing how long she would stay!" He clenched his fists and cried bitterly:

"The man who said that a woman who was untrue to one man would be untrue to two or a dozen knew her and her kind!"

Noel was motionless; and, after a few more turns up and down the room, Floriot went on:

"I know that she must have loved me, or why should she have married me? If she wanted position she could have married men farther up in the world than I was—than I am now. If she wanted money she could have married a bigger bank account than mine. No! She loved me—for a year. You said she was not naturally wicked. She was nothing else. Her love is a passion that burns itself out in a year and she will probably have a dozen lovers before she dies!"

There was a restless movement in the chair that Floriot did not notice.

"Noel, you can't realize the happiness of my life until I—I—learned that I was a fool! For the first year I pitied the whole world because it couldn't be as utterly happy as I was. It didn't seem possible that a man could be more completely filled with joy and content. Then our boy was born, and after that it seemed that before I had been miserable by contrast!" Anguish choked him and he was silent until he recovered control.

"Before that time I thought that I had fully the average man's capacity for work and then it was doubled. I was in my office early and late—every

moment that I could tear myself away from my home. I even worked in my study at night so that I could be near her and our baby and still be struggling for them. And my spirit was always with her—at her feet—God! How I worshipped her!" he groaned, his hands pressed to his face. Again there was a silence in which Noel could hear his friend's heavy breathing.

"Noel," he went on at last, "if I had not lost belief in everything but hell, I would believe that God Himself must have destroyed my happiness because He envied me, and could promise me none in heaven to equal that I had on earth! It was too great, too complete, for this life!

"I had set my eyes on the position I now hold as the first big step in my climb, and I was tireless in my work for it. I was as sure that I would win as I was of the sanctity of my home. Then came the scandal in the Finance Department."

"Did you hear anything about it? Do you remember? Some rather big men were convicted." Noel nodded almost imperceptibly.

"There was one brilliant young fellow in the lot, of whom you may not have heard—thanks to my efforts. Lescelles—Albert Lescelles. I was morally certain before I had been working on the

case three days that he was innocent. The older and dishonest cabal had carefully prepared a chain of circumstantial evidence that would lead to Lescelles. None of my associates agreed with me, and that made my work harder; but I finally proved my theory to be the sound one, and you remember the sensation it created when the net of lies was finally ripped and some of our most respected public officers were dragged into the scandal.

"It was a great triumph for me, though my part in it was not generally known beyond official circles. Lescelles knew it and tried to kill me with gratitude. The day that he was discharged we were both drunk with excitement, and I insisted that he should come home to dinner with me that evening."

Floriot paused again in his tramp to and fro to wipe his moist brow.

"It was a merry dinner the three of us had that night! Lescelles was a brilliant young fellow and I never knew Jacqueline to be wittier or more entertaining. For the few months preceding she had been a little more contained and reserved, but she blossomed out into her old self.

"After dinner I left them together and went to

my study to attend to some urgent matters that were to come up the next day, and I can remember now how I smiled to hear the laughter coming up to me. If the wine had poisoned him!" he groaned. . . .

"He came to see us often after that. He was alone in the world and seemed to have such a good time with us that I was always glad to have him. I could see that Jacqueline liked him and that was enough for me. He never tired of thanking me for what I had done for him, and his face would light with pleasure whenever he saw me.

"How was I to suspect anything?" As his visits became more frequent and my work grew more absorbing, I encouraged him to escort Jacqueline to the races and the other places of amusement of which she was always so fond. I seldom had time to go with her. But in spite of this friendship Jacqueline grew more affectionate to me every day and pleaded with me constantly to go about with her and let my work take care of itself. I showed her time and again how impossible this was, and then she would pout until Lescelles came, and I would tell him to take her somewhere.

"What a blind fool I was!" he cried with a harsh laugh. "I can see it all now. And what an

actress she was! The more guilty she grew with Lescelles the more affection she displayed for me to prevent any hint of suspicion.

"One day I told her that I would be unusually busy—would dine at a café and would not be home until very late. But, as it happened, when I returned to my office after dinner, I found there was nothing of importance and so I went home."

He stopped again and the other could see that he was fighting to retain his composure as he reached the climax of the story. Noel did not speak or stir, but the hand that had but rested on the arm of the chair gripped it tightly.

"Noel!" There was unspeakable anguish in his voice. "Noel! In the blackness of these two years I've suffered so that I've sometimes wished that I had not gone home that night until I was expected! It was raining a little and when I reached the front door I let myself in without making any noise. I wanted to surprise Jacqueline and—— Oh, God! I did—I did—I did!" And with a sobbing groan he sank into a chair and bowed his head on his arms.

It was a long time before he could continue, and when he began again his voice was hoarse with the effort he made to speak calmly.

"My friend, God grant that you may never know what I felt when I opened the door of the room where they were and found them—together! For you will never know till you have been—as I was! I think the shock must have unbalanced my mind in the moment that I saw them as I opened the door, for I leaned against the door-post and stared at them as if paralyzed. They leaped up and were staring back at me, and their faces—! They probably thought that I was enjoying a moment of bitter joy before I killed them both, and do you know what was passing in my mind? I was thinking that a chair just behind her was too close to the divan, and that if she leaned back in it, it would probably strike and scar the furniture. My mind refused to grasp the horror that my eyes had seen.

"And then in some dim, vague way the idea worked into my benumbed brain—I must shoot them! I turned away from the door and stumbled down the hall toward my study. I didn't have any desire to kill them in any way—at that moment I didn't even think that I ought to do it. But it seemed to me that I must kill them, and with a revolver—in the same way that a man would go through a distasteful social function.

"I was some little time finding my revolver, but that did not seem at the time to make any difference. I came back with it in my hand, fully expecting to find them there, waiting to be shot—but the room was empty!

"And then the paralysis passed from my brain and I went mad with fury. I rushed through every room in the house, cursing them at the top of my voice. Fortunately, none of the servants was at home.

"Then I ran bareheaded out into the rain and dashed down the street aimlessly, in the hope that I had taken the right direction and might come up with them. Before I had gone a hundred feet I ran into someone and nearly shot him accidentally. He yelled with fright and ran. I had just sense enough to put the revolver in my outside coat pocket, and with my hand still gripping it, I hurried on."

He paused again to mop his brow, but his voice grew firmer and higher as the story of his wrongs worked him from grief to rage.

"I don't remember much of the rest of that night. I was only conscious of the rain on my face and that I was walking always at top speed without any goal. Now I was along the quays,

then I remember peering into a few cafés. It seems to me that I was stopped several times by gendarmes, who released me when I showed them my card, but I never heard of it afterward. I think I passed through the Bois once, but when dawn came I was in some vile street in Montmartre. And with the daylight came some sort of calm.

"I started back toward my house, and after a short walk found a cab. In that drive I became, as I thought, complete master of myself again. I know now that I was practically a somnambulist. I thought the whole thing over in an almost impersonal way, and decided I would devote the rest of my life to vengeance. I would hunt both of them down and kill them, and I would begin the hunt systematically that day.

"When I reached home my clothes were soaking wet and my collar and necktie were gone. I had probably torn them off and thrown them away. Rose met me in the hall, and it did not strike me as being at all strange that she asked no questions. I went up to my room, took a bath and dressed in the most faultless style that my wardrobe would permit. With the pistol in my pocket I started out again, first sending word that I

would not, probably, be in my office for several days.

"All that day I haunted the cafés and clubs that I knew Lescelles frequented. I did not intend to kill him there unless he saw me. My plan was to follow him to whatever place he had taken Jacqueline, and kill them together.

"No one had seen him and I went home early in the morning, bitterly disappointed. I sat in my study most of the day planning, imagining, devising the most delightful ways in which to commit the double murder, as I did not intend to use the revolver unless it became necessary. The way that struck me as being best would be to find them asleep and waken them with one hand on the throat of each. Those throats haunted me. A dozen times that night I felt the joy of sinking my fingers into them, slowly squeezing out their lives as they stared up at me with eyes pleading for mercy.

"I was setting out again that evening when I met Rose a few steps outside my door. I think she was waiting for me—and she had the baby in her arms." His voice wavered and sank as if the rest were too terrible to tell.

"Noel," he went on at last in a strained, uncer-

tain voice, "up to that moment I had not felt the slightest grief. I was apparently rational, but I was as insane as any man that ever lived. Fury and the lust of vengeance left no room for any other emotion. And," the voice dropped with horror until it was barely more than a hoarse whisper, "for a fraction of a moment I felt an impulse to kill the baby because it was hers!" Again he stopped, unable to go on. Noel could not repress a shudder but his hand shaded his features and he made no other sign that he had heard. Then Floriot spoke again.

"Noel! Noel!" he half-sobbed. "I thought the next moment that I was dying and—if it had only been true! For then for the first time came the realization of what I had lost. I must have staggered into my room and locked the door before I fainted, for light was coming in the window when I recovered consciousness and I was lying across my bed. With consciousness came the suffering that has not ceased for two years! . . .

"I will not try to tell you what the next few days were. I lost track of time. I could not eat or drink or sleep. My revolver lay on the table and a dozen times I picked it up to blow out my brains, but the thought of the baby stopped

me. I wept because I couldn't do it. She was so completely part of me that I did not see how I could live any longer.

"Finally, I made up my mind that no matter how dreary and empty my life might be, I must live for the boy's sake, and with that resolution I locked up the revolver, burned every letter and photograph of her that I had, I held them in the fire, one by one, until the flames burned my fingers! Then I came into the world again.

"I fled to work like a man running away from something and the work brought—success! Success!"—And he ended with a grating laugh.

Then he turned his white, drawn face and feverish eyes on the still figure in the chair.

"Now," he demanded, "my friend, which of us deserves the most pity?"

CHAPTER VI

CLOSING FOR THE DEFENSE

A minute—two—minutes—passed but Noel gave no sign that he had heard the question. The hand that shaded the eyes prevented Floriot from finding in his face any clue to his thoughts. He turned away with a sigh that might have been weariness or disappointment or both and sank slowly into a chair.

At last Noel rose and shook himself slightly as if shaking off a hypnotic spell. His face was a little pale and his eyes had a queer look. He walked over and put his hand on his friend's arm.

"Floriot," he said, gently, "between us there need be no talk of sympathy. You know that I feel your pain almost as much as if it were mine. But I see this thing from a different angle. Even before I heard your story I understood, of course, that she was guilty of grave misconduct. But it seems to me that she has been punished enough—and she has repented!"

Floriot's only reply was an exclamation of scorn and contempt.

"Then why should she have come back?" asked Noel.

"I don't think I told you that her lover is dead," replied Floriot, bitterly. Then he straightened up determinedly: "She shall never come into this house again!"

"She's your wife!" said Noel calmly.

"I won't have her near the boy!"

"He's her boy, too! And whatever becomes of your boy's mother now, my friend, you can take the responsibility."

Floriot stared at him in astonishment and anger.

"I! Responsible! For her?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you are responsible," was the firm reply. "Who knows what that poor woman may do now —after you have thrown her out!"

Floriot rose and burst out between anger and astonishment:

"Noel, what on earth is the matter with you? This woman has wrecked my home and ruined my life! Haven't I any rights? Wouldn't you have done what I did?"

"Your rights!" sneered his friend, with a scornful laugh. "Do you think that you have the right

to sentence the mother of your boy to the life that she will have to lead now? Your own conscience must be singularly clear and your own life wonderfully blameless, my friend! Your rights! Humph! What about your duties? Did you look after your duties as faithfully as you are now looking out for your rights?

"Jacqueline was young and thoughtless—did you guide her and guard her? By your own story you threw her in the way of an attractive man so that you could shift some of your duties on to his shoulders!

"Did you study her heart? You expected her to make you happy—did you study her happiness?" he cried with bitter scorn. "Did you remember that she is far younger than you are? Did your age try to understand her youth and its needs?"

He paused. Floriot had sunk uncertainly back into his chair under the weight of this arraignment.

"You don't answer! And because she—erred—because she has wounded your vanity by preferring—I'm not defending her!—by preferring another man to you when you did everything you could to make her do it, you throw her out and

close your door against her! And you tell me you love her!"

"God knows I love her!" groaned Floriot.

Noel turned away with a short, scornful laugh.

"You loved her!" he exclaimed, contemptuously.

"Noel!"

Noel wheeled on him with flashing eyes.

"I say, it's not true!" he cried. "I tell you, you did not love her! Love is stronger than hate, for nothing can stop it! True love will trample down any obstacle to pardon, to sacrifice! And no one who has not suffered can be sure that he has loved. No, my friend," he went on more calmly, "you didn't love Jacqueline. You loved her grace and her beauty and her charm but it did not blind you to her weakness! If you had really loved her she could have done you no irreparable wrong; for, even when she made this mistake, your love would have found an excuse!"

Floriot sprang up with an angry protest.

"No, no!" he cried. "Any man in the same place would have done what I did! You would—what would you do?"

Noel hesitated a moment. "I don't know—exactly—what I should do," he replied gravely,

"because I am a man with a man's limitations. But I know what *you ought* to do!"

"I will never forgive her! I——"

"Listen to me a minute, Louis!" interrupted his friend, sternly. "Jacqueline is the mother of your son. He is her child and you have dared to separate them for life! Instead of holding out a helping hand to her, you have thrown her out of your house! You might have saved her from her future and you have given her the first push down the hill that leads—we both know where! Wait! Listen to me! You are a public servant. When you plead against a criminal you ask for a verdict and a sentence in proportion to the crime committed. Your wife loved you and gave you a son. She sinned against you and is sorry for her sin, and yet"—his voice rose with bitter passion—"and yet you have sentenced her to misery, despair and death!"

A growing fright was driving the angry gleam from Floriot's eyes as he raised his hand in protest.

"No! No! I——" he began in an altered voice.

"Yes! Yes!" broke in his friend. "What will she do? What will become of her? Have you ever thought of that? She will have a dozen lovers, will

she? Who will be responsible? Have you ever thought of that?

"You have not! I can see it in your face! And I suppose you consider yourself an honorable man, a model husband, a blameless father! If you won't do your duty, Floriot, by the living God! I'll do it for you!"

Floriot started up and moved toward his friend with queer, halting steps.

"What—do—you—mean?" came from his lips in barely more than a whisper.

Noel looked squarely into his eyes.

"I mean that your wife shall find in my house the place that you refuse her! My life shall be hers—and I will ask nothing in exchange!"

Floriot halted and stiffened and for a dozen seconds the two men gazed into each other's eyes. Then Floriot spoke slowly and coldly:

"It seems to me, Noel, that you are presuming a little beyond the privilege of even a friend."

"In this case I have more than the privilege—of a friend!" was the calm reply, with a note of meaning in the voice.

Floriot continued to stare at him with a mixture of wonder and resentment. Then a sudden thought made him catch his breath with a sharp

hiss. His figure relaxed and he took a half-step forward.

"Noel! . . . Noel!" he gasped. "Jacqueline! . . . She was the woman—you loved!"

The blue eyes did not waver.

"Yes, it was Jacqueline! And," he added, bitterly, "I loved her better, if not more, than you did! . . ."

In the nerve-wracking night Floriot had exhausted, he thought, every emotion. This last shock numbed him. He groped his way to a chair and with both hands to his head tried to collect his wandering mind and grasp the meaning of Noel's admission.

Noel had loved Jacqueline! This was the woman for whom he had tried to kill himself! His brain reeled dizzily and he stared down at the carpet with unseeing eyes. It put his friend in a strange and almost incomprehensible light. All that he had said and done now took on a different aspect. Noel had loved her! He still loved her and defended her! All that his friend had said, all that Jacqueline had said, his talk with Madame Varenne—all swept back over him with a new meaning! Was he wrong? Should he have obeyed the impulse to forgive when she sobbed at his feet

—the impulse that he strangled almost at the cost of reason? . . . Noel was speaking but he barely heard the words.

"I loved her for years before your marriage," he was saying. "Many and many a time I made up my mind to speak to her but—I loved her more than I could tell her! I was afraid to risk everything on a word. Again and again I went away on my long wanderings, trying to show myself that I wanted nothing more than my freedom. The farther I traveled from St. Pierre the more miserable I grew and I always came back more in love than ever."

There was no grief or pain in his voice. He was still the judge denouncing the culprit.

"Then I began to think that she was falling in love with you! I tried again to take my life in my hands and to tell her I loved, but I couldn't. I ran away again, and this time I made up my mind that I would never come back. I got as far as Messina and bought my ticket for the next eastbound P. & O. Then I deliberately missed the boat and the next one. I couldn't drag myself up the gangplank!

"The next day, without hardly knowing how it happened, I found myself in the railway station,

on my way back to France. I had nearly reached her house when I heard of your betrothal!"

He paused for a moment and eyed his friend's bowed figure.

"I suppose you wonder, Louis, why I was not more completely overcome and horrified by your story of your madness. My madness carried me a little farther. I, too, sat up in my room with a revolver one night trying to decide whether I should kill you or myself or both of us!"

Floriot gave no sign that he had heard.

"The old Padre told me once when I was a boy," he went on in the same bitter tone, "there is a line somewhere in the holy writings which says, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' But his friend ought to show that he appreciates the sacrifice!" He paused again for a moment.

"If I had dreamed," he said with stern calmness, "that Jacqueline would be where she is to-night, I would have killed you, my friend, before I tried to kill myself!"

The voice ceased abruptly and Noel turned slowly away. The silence seemed to stir Floriot more than the lashing words. He raised his head wearily.

"What do you think I ought to do?"

"Do! Do!" cried Noel, wheeling, his face blazing with scorn. He walked quickly to the door and paused with his hand on the knob. "I am going to find Jacqueline! Are you coming with me?"

Floriot rose unsteadily—doubt, dread and the faint promise of returning hope in his face. He moved uncertainly over toward his friend with hand outstretched. Noel seized it in an eager, painful grip and they looked into each other's eyes with trembling lips.

Then, without a word, they passed down the hall and out of the house.

CHAPTER VII

THE WANDERERS

You will find in the chronicle of Matthew of Paris (and a reference to it somewhere in the Apocrypha) a legend of a Jew who refused a resting place on the bench by his door to the Friend of the World as He passed on His way to Calvary. And as He walked on He said:

"I go to My rest in My Father's house but thou shalt wander o'er the earth till I come again."

Many great writers have loved to believe the strange old tale, and it has been immortalized in prose and verse.

As the curse was launched, try to imagine that the ancient Jew felt in his heart a great dread and unrest, and he rose from the seat that he denied the Saviour and struck out across the desert.

Then—who knows?—for his further punishment the wind piled sand-dunes in his path, and as he toiled over them new ones rose, and ever in the form of the Cross. The palm trees were as

crosses through the heat-haze. A hundred times he was near death from thirst and heat but he could not die.

And when he came to the mountains the torrents were crosses and the snow drifts and the crags. He turned and sought death in the frozen North and the icebergs rose in cold and shining crosses. And southward in the trackless jungles, in the creepers at his feet and the vines overhead he saw the sign of him who walked on to Calvary.

Wandering over the face of the earth in suffering of the body and misery of the soul, praying daily for the death that is denied him, he must go on and on, and always about his path the hated symbol of his curse.

Louis Floriot thought often of the queer old legend in the dark years that followed that night in the house at Passy. Some one once said that the greatest hell on earth is reserved for the man who returns to his empty house from his wife's funeral and begins to ask himself whether he was or was not responsible for her death. But there is one even more terrible than that—believing that he is in a large measure responsible for her shame. And Louis Floriot stretched himself on that bed of torture every night of his life.

When he and Noel set out on their search they fully expected to find her within forty-eight hours at the longest. They learned at the Passy station that a woman answering Jacqueline's description had taken a train for Paris a short time before they arrived! so that simplified the hunt. They roamed through the cafés of the better sort and examined the registers of the larger hotels all through the night, planning to get help in the morning.

There was one dread in the hearts of both that neither dared speak until after daylight. They had found no clue after seeing the man at the Passy station, and when they took breakfast together they were avoiding each other's eyes as they talked.

Floriot would not eat, but his friend insisted that he drink several cups of coffee and two small glasses of brandy. When he saw his eye brighten and a faint touch of color return to his pale cheeks, Noel suggested as gently as possible:

"There is one more place that we ought to visit before we do anything else, Louis."

Floriot glanced at him with questioning dread. Noel read his thoughts and nodded.

"I don't think she would do it—as long—as long

—as the boy is alive, and I don't want to alarm you needlessly. But we might as well be sure," he continued.

Both had feared all night that when Jacqueline reached Paris and realized that she was alone in the world with no place to go and no one to turn to for aid, comfort or advice, she might have thrown herself in the Seine. They were going to the morgue to see if her body had been found.

They walked through the rows of the silent figures wrapped in white sheets, and as the face of every woman was uncovered, Floriot gave a gasp and closed his eyes before he dared to look. The body they dreaded to find was not there, and they silently thanked God as they came out into the sunlight again.

Then they hastily formed a plan of campaign. Noel went out to the house in Passy to get a photograph of Jacqueline that he had in his bag. It was six years old, but it was better than none. He was to meet Floriot at the office of the Chief of the Parisian police.

The chief knew the young Deputy Attorney very well, and had a deep admiration and respect for him. He did not ask any useless or embarrassing

questions when Floriot told him what he wanted. Being a good policeman he already knew much of the private life of the man, and it was easy for him to fill in the gaps in Floriot's story. Noel returned with the photograph and he promised that he would have a number of reproductions made and put his best men on the search.

Leaving the office of the police chief they made the rounds of all the hospitals without learning anything of a woman answering Jacqueline's description. Then Noel insisted that they could do nothing more that day and that they had better go out to Passy, have a good dinner and a night's rest.

All the way home, at dinner, and throughout the evening Noel talked to his friend with a buoyancy he did not feel. As the day wore on he realized what a task they had undertaken, and already he began to feel that if they succeeded in finding her it must be due more to chance than otherwise. But he had no idea of abandoning the search. In his heart he told himself that he would devote his life to it if necessary.

And Floriot? Like the Jew of the legend the spirit of unrest had already entered his soul. He made a hundred vain and impracticable sugges-

tions in the course of the evening, each one involving useless activity on the part of himself and his friend. But the manifest futility of adopting any of his plans did not weigh with him. He wanted to be doing something. Noel finally drugged him with Burgundy and persuaded him to go to bed with many assurances that the Chief would have her or be on the trail in the morning.

"Noel, old man, I don't want to sleep!" was his last protest. "What do you think about going, as I suggested, down to——"

"Tut! Tut!" interrupted Noel, testily. "What have you employed the police for? Go to sleep, old man! It'll be all right by to-morrow night!"

And with a final handshake he left him.

In spite of his protest that he did not want to sleep, a mine explosion would not have stirred Floriot two minutes after he touched the bed. Exhausted Nature seized the opportunity to make up for the drains of more than two weeks, and he was still sleeping heavily when Noel came to call him shortly after noon.

"I've just come from the Chief's office," said Noel, brightly, after he had listened to and put aside Floriot's reproaches for not calling him.

He did not mention that he had been to the morgue again.

"And what does he say?" demanded the other sitting up with eager anxiety. Noel avoided his eyes.

"He hasn't anything definite to report but he assures me that it is only a question of hours," he replied, cheerfully. "He has telegraphed to the frontiers and all the seaports, and unless Jacqueline has left France we have her just as surely as if she were in the next room now!"

"Left France! She can't have done that!" exclaimed Floriot.

"It's hardly possible in that length of time," agreed the other, "and for that reason I think that our friend the chief will have news for us by to-morrow night—*sure!*"

But there was no news "to-morrow night" nor the next night. The nights grew to weeks and the weeks to months and the months to years, and there was never a trace of the missing woman from the moment she left the Passy station.

Noel, true to the vow he had sworn the day after she left, spent his life in the search for her. He had ample funds, and Floriot was well provided for in the goods of the world. All the capitals of

Europe and the larger cities he searched, aided by the police. He made friends with the demi-monde and the "submerged" of many races. The painted women of St. Petersburg and the belles of the Tenderloin knew him equally well. But it was all in vain. Jacqueline had disappeared.

Floriot could not abandon his work, for the sake of his boy, but he took from it all the time that he could spare. He labored now without soul and without ambition. The one thing in his life that seemed worth while was to find his wife.

He and Noel wrote to each other constantly when the latter was away—advising, suggesting, planning. All the time that he could take from the courts he employed in roaming about Europe while Noel was on the other side of the world. And like the sign of the cross to the ancient Jew, a hundred times a year he thought that in the glimpse of a profile or the sound of a woman's voice behind him, he had reached the end of his quest. And each disappointment was more bitter than the last.

Even in his home there was no escape. For as Raymond grew up it became more evident every year that his dark, passionate eyes, smooth forehead and dark curly hair were his mother's. The

firmly cut jaw and mouth and straight, high-bred nose came from his father.

He was growing into a splendid young man, as clean mentally as he was physically. He was the one joy of his father's life and he tried to make up in his love what the boy missed in not having the mother that had been driven away.

He had an inherited taste for the law and at school he was a source of constant pride to his father. He was prouder when the young man—just turned twenty-four—was admitted to practice in the courts of France.

Floriot had been transferred from Paris to Dijon and from there to Bordeaux. He was appointed President of the Toulouse Court just before Raymond became a full-fledged advocate. This made it necessary for father and son to part because the son could not practise in his father's court. It was therefore decided that Raymond should remain in Bordeaux with Rose as housekeeper. She had been the nurse of the boy's babyhood, had raised him, and grown gray hair in the service. She was a fixture for life in the Floriot establishment.

About this time two men who had never even heard of any of the characters in this story—excepting M. Floriot, for whom they entertained

a marked respect and hearty dislike, although he did not know of their existence—sat down one morning and wrote a letter, the effect of which was far beyond their foresight or wildest imaginings.

CHAPTER VIII

"CONFIDENTIAL MISSIONS"

It was nearly twenty years after the disappearance of Jacqueline that M. Robert Henri Perissard and his very dear confrère, M. Modiste Hyacinthe Merivel, reached their office in a little street not very far from the Palace of Justice, about nine o'clock in the morning, as was their custom.

They always took a cab in going to and from their place of business for the same reason that the cab never took them to the door of their residence. And, for the same reason, their residence was in one of the worst streets of Montmartre. One maintained an address in the Rue Fribourg and the other in Rue St. Denis, but neither could ever be found there.

Their little home was beautifully furnished, but it was on the top floor of a squalid-looking building, and scarcely a soul in the world besides themselves knew that they lived there. They did not look at all like residents of the vilest quarter of

A Metro Goldwyn Mayer Picture. *Madame X*

FLORIOT TELLS HIS WIFE THAT HER SON THINKS SHE IS DEAD.

Paris. In fact, their appearance was so blamelessly respectable that it would have aroused the suspicions of a clever policeman.

All this may seem strange, but in their relation to society it was quite necessary. It was their mission in life to avenge all transgressions of the laws of God and man. They ferreted out evildoing that escaped or was not punishable by the police, and heavily fined the evildoers. It was a lucrative business, but they dared not live up to anything like the full strength of their income. It would attract too much attention, and gentlemen who engage in that business always shrink from notoriety. As it is, they are frequently found in queer places decorated with bullet holes or knife wounds of great merit.

Then, besides, the natural guardians of the community—the police—are frequently brutal enough to call them "blackmailers" and send them to prison for long terms. So you can see that only gentlemen of great caution and perspicacity can ply the trade successfully.

M. Perissard, the elder of the two, had in conversation a mixture of pomposity and unction that was truly edifying.

He was about medium height with a rotund

figure, bald head, bushy side-whiskers and little porcine eyes in a fat face. If you were not a close observer of men you would have taken him for a prosperous banker.

His companion, M. Merivel, was the larger and younger man. He affected an even more subdued and painfully respectable garb. He had oily black hair and heavy jowls. He was gifted with a deep heavy voice, though not so glib a tongue, but it was most impressive to hear him back up his co-worker's statements with rumbling affirmatives.

The commodities in which they dealt are not hard to come by—especially in Continental Europe. There is scarcely a wealthy family that has not some secret that it would rather the world did not know. For men with the shrewdness and insight of Messrs. Perissard and Merivel a whisper, a breath, was enough. A patient and careful system of espionage and research and a little judicious bribing of servants and, lo! The thing was done!

Lately their business had been remarkably successful and was spreading rapidly—so rapidly that they had found it necessary to take in another man to look after their interests in Lyons, where

they had two or three "*most* promising affairs," as M. Merivel would have put it. And now they felt the need of a shrewd man in Bordeaux—shrewd and courageous, for they had laid out a 'mission" there that was so dangerous that neither cared to handle it in person, and yet so lucrative that it could not be abandoned.

The man in Lyons had proved that he was just the genius needed there and the partners feared that they should "never look upon his like again." For weeks they had gone over the field of reckless and unscrupulous blackguards whom they knew—and knew to be at that time out of prison—but they could not fix upon one who, they were sure, had the ability and the loyalty combined.

It was in this dilemma that M. Perissard began opening the morning's mail, sighing heavily, while his associate busied himself with a collection of society papers from various capitals in the hope of unearthing a profitable hint of threatened scandal.

The first letter was from the editor of a blackmailing weekly who received commissions on all of his "tips" that developed into financial gain for the firm of "Perissard and Merivel, Confidential Missions." It contained the information that a certain Marquise had gone into a secluded part of

Switzerland "for her health" and was very anxious to maintain the utmost secrecy, as it was well known that her husband had been in the Far East for more than a year.

M. Perissard put the letter carefully to one side of his desk and picked up the next, which bore a queer-looking South American stamp. He opened it and glanced over the two sheets of notepaper that it contained, and as he read his face expressed a grateful and uplifting joy.

"My dear Merivel!" he exclaimed. "Our problem is solved! The—veree—thing!"

M. Merivel ponderously folded his paper and turned a look of heavy inquiry on his associate.

"Indeed!" he rumbled.

"True! my dear friend, true!" M. Perissard assured him, joyously. "Listen!" And this is what he read:

Café Libertad, Buenos Ayres, Feb. 11th.

My Revered Preceptor:

You will no doubt be surprised to hear from me, and especially in this God-forsaken place, but here I am without exactly knowing how I got here. Furthermore, now that I am here and have been here for some weeks, I don't see how I am going to live much longer.

South America is a great place for government officials and cattle raisers. Cattle thieves, I am told, do rather well, too, but none of these three lines of occupation is open to me. I haven't the influence for the first, the capital for the second or the inclination for the third. It is *bourgeois*, and it is well for us of the upper classes to keep our hands clean of vulgar theft. The more gentlemanly forms of acquiring mentionable sums are practically useless. These people of Latin America have the suspicious nature of all provincials; and, as most of them chat about their family scandals in the cafés, it is not a fruitful field for a discreet young man with a keen scent. The very wealthy are usually investing in revolutions, and I have no vocation for that form of promoting.

All this, my dear teacher, is simply a prelude to the information that I want to get back to La Belle France—want to very badly. If you can find something for me to do and want me badly enough to pay my passage, I will take the first ship that sails. You can reach me at the above address, unless a certain yellow-skinned suitor of one of the ladies at the café knifes me before I hear from you. Believe me to be yours dutifully,

FREDERIC LAROQUE.

M. Perissard read and M. Merivel heard this flippant letter without the trace of a smile. They

were serious-minded folk. "Confidential missions" have the effect of dwarfing the sense of humor, and they had been in the profession for many years.

"A-ahem!" said M. Merivel heavily. "And this Frederic Laroque——?"

"He is a young man who was a clerk in my office before we became partners, my dear Merivel," explained M. Perissard, smiling happily. "He displayed a singular aptitude for our work but—— Youth! Youth!" He shook his head. "He would not stay with me as I advised. He insisted on going his own way and I lost sight of him in a short time. I am really surprised that he is not in prison, but it shows that he must have developed as I knew that he would. His hardships in the New World probably have had the needed subduing effect. And now he is an instrument made to our hand! Thoroughly loyal to his friend or employer he always was, I assure you, my dear Merivel, and without fear—without fear absolutely! Oh, it is providential! Providential!" and he raised his hands piously.

"*Most* providential!" echoed M. Merivel in rolling thunder. Then he added: "You are certain, my dear Robert, that the young man is trust-

worthy? You remember that Guadin was also fearless!"

"Oh, quite so! Quite so, my dear friend!" his confrère hastened to assure him. "He is the soul of honor! He would not think of attempting anything dishonest with me!"

"In that case," came from the depths of M. Merivel's chest, "I think that we would do well to send him the money."

"Just what I was going to propose the moment I finished his letter!" declared M. Perissard.

So the letter was written and a postal order for a thousand francs enclosed. Laroque was requested to meet M. Perissard at the Hotel of the Three Crowns in Bordeaux as soon as he could get there.

* * * * * * *

Some three weeks later M. Frederic Laroque, accompanied by the lady of the Café Libertad, walked up the gangplank of the "Amazon," bound for France, while on the pier, Manuel Silvas blasphemed the Virgin because he was armed only with a knife; and Laroque had carelessly dropped his hand on his pistol pocket as he passed.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOTEL OF THE THREE CROWNS

Marie, the pretty chambermaid of the Hotel of the Three Crowns, was visibly nervous one misty day in April. She could not be kept away from the front door, which opened on a dingy street a few minutes' walk from the railway station.

Not that there was any particular reason why she should not be there. The guests of the Hotel of the Three Crowns were late risers as a rule. It was too early to set about her duties, and in the meantime the proprietor would rather have had her at the front door than anywhere else, for we have mentioned the fact that she was pretty, and that made her the only attractive feature about the front of the down-at-heel little inn. Transients of the commercial traveler type were seldom known to walk past the door if they caught a glimpse of Marie.

It was for one of these gentlemen that Marie was so anxiously waiting, and her nervousness

was due to the fact that her husband, Victor, the "boots" of the hotel, was roaming around in the background. He was as simple-minded and unattractive as a husband ought to be. Whenever his intellect tried to grasp anything beyond the mysteries of cleaning shoes and carrying trunks it ran into heavy opaque obstructions.

Marie might have carried on a dozen flirtation under his very chin and he would have been none the wiser. But she had never done it, because of her naturally clean morals. So now, that she was preparing to inflict on him the greatest wrong that she had in her power to commit, she felt the trepidation that always precedes the first plunge into crime.

In spite of the wrought-up condition of her mind she could not help observing curiously a queer-looking pair that alighted from a cab in front of the door. The man was a tall, rather slender but muscular man of thirty-five or past with sandy hair, a bold chin and sparkling pale gray eyes that ran over her trim figure and pretty face with undisguised pleasure. It was his dress that most attracted her attention. He wore a long, check traveling coat of rough English cloth and soft gray hat, patent-leather shoes with singularly high

heels, brown and very baggy "peg-top" trousers. His open coat and overcoat disclosed a gray silk shirt and loose black tie. But the really bizarre feature of the costume was a broad red sash about the waist in place of the conventional belt or braces.

The woman, his companion, was rather flashily dressed in clothes that bore the marks of travel and long wear. She was small and might once have been pretty. She was now plainly past forty and looked all of it. Her figure still retained suggestions of a departed grace. Her hair was dark and wavy but it was cut short, and she had dark, unnaturally bright eyes. Even Marie knew enough of the world to place her at once in a calling that is older than the profession of arms. In her face, glance and walk she bore the brand that Nature places on those who "eat the bread of infamy and take the wage of shame." But what Marie did not understand was the unearthly, almost translucent, pallor of her face and the peculiar delicacy of the pouches under the eyes—the hall-marks of the drug slave.

The man dropped a large traveling bag on the sidewalk and then helped the driver of the cab unship a small and much battered trunk. The

woman eyed the proceedings listlessly. Then he turned to Marie with a breezy smile.

"Well, my dear, have you a room to spare and some strong and willing young man to help me carry this trunk up to it?" he asked. On being addressed, the maid started and then smiled sweetly.

"Oh, yes, monsieur! I think there is still a vacant room. Victor! Victor!" she called, turning her head to the doorway. In a few moments her husband shambled out. He had a placid, gently inquiring expression that made his face resemble nothing so much as that of a good-natured horse.

"Just give me a lift with this trunk, my man," commanded the guest, briskly, as Victor came down the steps. The procession streamed into the house, leaving Marie still on guard at the door, much to the gentleman's regret. Victor showed the way up two flights of stairs to a rather large room under the roof. It contained one big bed, two small tables, a dressing-case and several chairs. The porter, in a slow drawl, pointed out that one of the most stylish features of the apartment was a small dressing-room that opened off it. The walls and low ceiling were kalsomined. The

floor was stained with cheap paint and a few cheaper rugs were scattered about.

A step or two inside the door the man stopped, looked around and laughed.

"H'm! I've seen better!" he remarked.

"It's the only one we've got left, monsieur," drawled Victor.

"Not a palace, is it?" he went on, turning to his companion. She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"Oh, what does it matter? This room or any other!" she replied, and the indifference of tone and words matched the weariness of her manner and the carelessness of her tawdry attire.

"Well, I don't suppose we shall be here long," said her companion.

He and Victor carried the luggage into the dressing-room.

The woman took off her hat and cloak, put the former on the dresser, threw the latter carelessly across a chair and dropped wearily into another.

"Oh, I'm tired!" she sighed.

"Has anyone inquired for M. Laroque—Frederic Laroque?" the man was asking as he came back with Victor. The porter handed him a card.

"This gentleman called about an hour ago," he replied. Laroque glanced at it.

"Perissard," he nodded, half to himself.

"He said he'd come back in about an hour," he drawled.

"All right! Show him up when he does," he ordered briskly, taking off his coat and overcoat.

"Can I get you anything, monsieur?"

"A bottle of absinthe!" was the prompt reply.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And some cigarettes."

"Yes, monsieur." And, the guest adding nothing further to the order, he shuffled out and slowly closed the door. Laroque looked again at the card that he still held in his hand.

"I wonder what that old devil is up to now!" he murmured, thoughtfully. He had been wondering ever since he received the letter and the thousand francs. The woman did not hear him; or, if she did, paid no attention.

"This is better than the ship, anyhow, isn't it?" she remarked from the depths of the big arm-chair. Laroque was busily emptying his pockets on to the top of the dresser. As he took out the pistol he thought of Señor Silvas and smiled.

"Yes!" he declared emphatically, "I've had enough of the sea for a long time. You ought to

be glad to be back again; you were certainly anxious to see 'la belle France,' weren't you?"

"I've been away from it for twenty—twenty years!" said the woman in a low voice.

"I shouldn't wonder if you found a change or two," he suggested pleasantly, marching into the dressing-room to "wash up." She sighed wearily.

"I don't suppose I'll find any changes greater than those in myself."

"Because you have your hair cut short?" came from the dressing-room with a laugh. "People often have their hair cut short for all sorts of reasons. Typhoid fever is better than most. And I rather like your short curly hair. You look like a boy, dressed up!"

"I'm not thinking of my hair," she returned wearily. "I'm thinking of what I was twenty years ago when I left France and what I am to-day."

"If it hurts you to think of it, my girl, don't think of it!" he suggested lightly, appearing at the door with a towel in his hands.

"I suppose you are right—perhaps that is the better way," was the reply in world-weary tones.

"Of course, it is!" he assured her cheerfully. "What's done can't be undone, old girl. There

are lots of women more to be pitied than you are."

"I wonder!" she murmured, with a faint bitter smile.

"To begin with," he went on, vigorously polishing his nails on his trouser legs, "you are the only woman I have loved for the last six months! That ought to count for something, oughtn't it?"

"Twenty years ago!" she repeated more to herself than to him. "I was young and pretty then."

"Oh, you look all right by gaslight now!" he assured her.

"I had a husband and child," she went on without heeding. "Now, I am alone—with nothing left!"

"And what about me, pray!" he protested with a laugh. "Don't I count for something?"

"Oh, shut up!" she snapped, pettishly. "I don't want to play the fool to-day!"

"So I see," retorted Laroque, with an ironical bow. "Madame has her nerves, has she?"

"To-day I'm sick of everything," she continued drearily. "Life disgusts me. I'd sell mine for a centime!"

"Oh, it's worth more than that! Now, buck up!" he cried, cheerfully. "I quite understand that you used to be a rich woman and now you are not, but everyone has his ups and downs. Look at me! I used to be a lawyer's clerk—old Perissard's clerk—and look at me now! Take the times as they come, old girl, and money when you can get your hands on it! That's my motto—money's the only thing that matters!"

She turned her head slowly toward him with a contemptuous look.

"Oh, I know you'd do anything for money!"

M. Laroque shrugged his shoulders.

"Better that than do nothing and get nothing for it," he replied with light philosophy, taking a chair at the opposite side of the table.

Victor entered with bottle of absinthe and the cigarettes and deposited them carefully between them. Laroque rubbed his hands together and gazed at the bottle with glistening eyes.

"Good!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically. "Now, mix up the drinks, old girl, and put some power in 'em! You want yours about as badly as I want mine!"

The woman uncorked the bottle and began preparing the absinthe while he lighted a cigarette

and turned to Victor, who stood stolidly by the table.

"What's going on in Bordeaux?" he asked pleasantly. "Is there any fun?"

Victor studied the question gravely and then drawled:

"Well, it's amusing sometimes, then sometimes it isn't."

Laroque's clear laugh rang out.

"Now, we know all about it, don't we?"

Victor stared at him with the mild gaze of a surprised cow. He did not see the joke and didn't feel up to the mental effort of looking for it.

"Will you dine at the table d'hôte?" he inquired.

"What's the cooking like?" Again Victor pondered for several moments.

"Well," he drawled at last, "some people say it's good and then—some people say it isn't."

Again Laroque roared with laughter.

"Well, you are a mine of information, aren't you?" he shouted. Victor did not acknowledge the compliment.

"Dinner's at seven," he announced solemnly.

"Right!"

"If you want anything, ring once for me and twice for the chambermaid."

"Thank you, my lord!" bowed Laroque.

"Shall I take away the absinthe?" he asked, as the woman slowly put the bottle down when enough of the milky fluid had dripped slowly into the tumblers. The other quickly put out a restraining hand.

"Nay, nay, my lord!" he replied, firmly. "Never remove a bottle until it's empty!"

"It makes no difference to me, monsieur."

"Just what I thought!" was the retort. "But it makes a good deal of difference to me!" And as Victor slowly slouched out he picked up one of the tumblers with trembling hands and took a sip.

"Great! Great!" he murmured, closing his eyes in ecstasy.

"Yes, it is good, isn't it?" And the woman took a long drink.

"It's a marvel! A marvel! There's nothing you do better than an absinthe! Light up, old girl and let's be happy!"

She lighted a cigarette, and for several minutes they smoked and sipped in silence.

"Are we going to stay here long?" she asked at last, in a tone that implied that it made no difference to her whether they did or not.

"I don't know," he replied, passing over his empty glass as she began laying the foundations of another drink. "That depends on Perissard. I must have a chat with him before I can say."

"Who is Perissard?" she inquired indifferently.

"I told you I used to be his clerk. He's a lawyer!"

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Oh, he's a clever old devil!" smiled Laroque. "He knows the Code Napoleon backwards! When I wrote to him I thought to myself, 'There's a postage stamp wasted, for Perissard has either retired from business or he's making felt shoes in prison somewhere, unless he's flirting with the dusky native ladies of New Caledonia.' But I was wrong, you see, for he's not in prison, says he's glad to hear from me and sends me a thousand francs to pay my passage. That knocked me edgewise! The old fox certainly needs me for something. He doesn't spend a thousand francs for nothing!"

"Be careful!" she warned him, but the tone was a mockery of the words.

"Don't worry!" he replied jauntily. "I'll keep my eyes open and——" a knock at the door interrupted him. "There he is now, I guess. Come

in!" he called, turning his head toward the door. It was opened quickly and with brisk step, M. Perissard, closely followed by his associate in "Confidential missions," bustled in.

CHAPTER X

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

"My dear Laroque!" exclimed M. Perissard, effusively holding out his hand as the adventurer advanced to meet him.

"Well! How are you, monsieur?" returned the other, cordially shaking his hand. "By heaven! You've put on flesh, haven't you?"

M. Perissard laughed.

"Ah! I put most of that on with my clothes every morning," he explained with a wink of elephantine slyness.

"Every morning! What on earth for?" demanded Laroque, blankly.

"Thin people do not inspire confidence," declared M. Perissard, impressively, but still smiling. "Fat people do!" Then he noticed the woman in the chair and evolved an elaborate bow, seconded by M. Merivel. "Madame!"

"My life's companion—for the last six months," said Laroque, with flippant irony and an introduc-

tory wave of his hand. The partners bowed once more in unison and the woman acknowledged the introduction with a perfunctory nod, the absinthe and cigarette immediately reclaiming her attention.

"Let me present M. Merivel," said Perissard, suavely. "Formerly a schoolmaster, but now my friend and associate!"

"Delighted!" exclaimed Laroque, squeezing a limp, mushy hand, "But, sit down! Sit down!"

All three took chairs, the visitors carefully placing their silk hats on the floor beside them.

"And first let me thank you," he went on addressing himself to the older man, "to begin with——"

"For the thousand francs I sent you?"

"Yes," nodded Laroque. M. Perissard smiled.

"When I received your letter it struck me that you were not exactly rolling in money," he said with ponderous playfulness.

"I wasn't—exactly!" laughed the young man.

"So I thought it was well to send you a little on account," continued M. Perissard.

"And supposing I had put the money in my pocket and remained in South America?"

"I should have lost my thousand francs. But I wasn't afraid of that," his prospective employer

assured him. "I knew you too well, Laroque. I knew you to be too—too——"

"Too honest?" grinned the adventurer.

"Too intelligent," corrected M. Perissard, "to do such a foolish thing. What are a thousand francs," with an expressive sweep of his arm, "in the position I am going to offer you!"

"As good as that, eh?" There was an eager gleam in his eyes.

"Ask M. Merivel!" said the senior partner bowing toward his friend.

M. Merivel, thus appealed to, delivered his first contribution to the chat in an unctuous bass.

"A first class position! *Most* admirable!"

"Well! That sounds interesting!" and Laroque hitched his chair a little nearer.

The woman had just finished concocting a third glass of absinthe and now she rose with:

"I'll leave you to your business talk and go and unpack the trunk."

"Yes, do, my girl!" nodded her "life's companion," and she passed out with the drink and the package of cigarettes.

"Now then, to business!" said M. Perissard in slightly crisper tones when the door had closed.

"Right!"

"To begin with, I'm no longer a lawyer," declared M. Perissard.

"So I see," nodded Laroque. "According to your card you are now a Notary Public." His eyes twinkled.

Messrs. Perissard and Merivel laughed at the same moment and for precisely the same length of time. The Siamese Twins were in constant discord compared with these two.

"That's to inspire confidence," explained the senior partner.

"I see! Like this!" chuckled the adventurer sticking his finger into M. Perissard's paunch.

"Ah, yes!" rumbled M. Merivel, rolling his eyes up piously and clasping his hands, "Confidence is such a be—u—tiful thing in these days of disrespect! Alas! To-day respect is rapidly disappearing. The young have ceased to respect the old and the family solicitor no longer holds the proud position that was his. 'Where are the snows of yesteryear'?"

Laroque listened to this speech with a grin that indicated an utter absence of the virtue the decline of which struck M. Merivel as so exceedingly deplorable.

"By Jove! He talks well, doesn't he?" he exclaimed.

"Like a book!" declared M. Perissard in a hoarse but enthusiastic whisper. "But to resume," he added in his "business" voice, "I'm in business now."

"What sort of business?" inquired the adventurer.

"Business of all kinds. I refuse no business!"

"With money in it," amended M. Merivel, in a thunderous aside.

"But we deal principally in the faults, vices and weakness of our fellow men," continued the senior partner.

"Sounds like a good trade!" commented Laroque, heartily, his lips twitching, as he glanced from one to the other.

"And a *most* moral one!" came unctuously from the unsounded depths of M. Merivel's chest, "For we do good with the Strong Hand, you see. Ah—*utile dulci*—the Latin—ahem!"

"I don't altogether get you," said the young man, crossing one knee over the other with the air of a man who has made up his mind not to understand hints. M. Perissard shifted his chair a little, cleared his throat and leaned forward with his hands on his thighs.

"You shall!" he declared, a little more of the "stagey" quality was missing in his voice. "There are very few houses without a skeleton in the closet."

"Skeletons are cheap to-day!" struck in M. Merivel's bass.

"And in the best families there are often secrets which are worth a fortune," continued M. Perissard, impressively.

Laroque's eye-brows went up.

"O, I see," he said a trifle coolly, "Blackmail!"

Four large fat hands went up simultaneously in a gesture of horror and two shocked voices burst forth as one.

"Sh—h—h! My dear young friend! What an ugly word!"

"We are humble helpers in the cause of justice! *Most* ugly word!"

"Find it rather dangerous, don't you?" pursued Laroque in the same tone.

"We do not!" came the reply in chorus, baritone and bass.

"Pays, does it?"

Again the four plump hands went up.

"Pay! My dear Laroque, I should think it did!"

cried Perissard. "You will very soon find out for yourself how well it pays for I propose paying you—in addition to your salary—ten per cent upon the profits! You won't find it hard work and you won't find it difficult. Quickness, discretion and tact are all that are required. I know you pretty well, my dear friend. You are intelligent and energetic and I'm sure you are honest! Not too scrupulously so at all times—but—ah—you understand!"

"Scruples are out of date," groaned M. Merivel, shaking his head gloomily, "*Ne quid nimis*—the Latin again—ahem!"

"And you are fond of money!" went on the spokesman.

Laroque smiled and nodded.

"Well, then! You shall have the money!" declared M. Perissard. Word, look and tone were those of a true philanthropist.

"It's a tempting offer," admitted the adventurer, rubbing his chin, reflectively; "but, you know, I was sometime getting out of—— It has not been many years since I was in trouble and I don't want any more trouble if I can help it."

"What possible trouble can there be?" M. Perissard protested.

"Well, you know, even a lamb will bleat if you handle him roughly."

"Our little lambkins don't!" the older man assured him with an oily, paternal smile in which his confrère nobly seconded him. "They have a horror of all kinds of fuss and do not draw attentions to themselves if they can help it."

"The fear of a fuss is the beginning of wisdom!" rose from M. Merivel's diaphragm in oracular thunder.

"So there is nothing to be afraid of! Our head office is in Paris," resumed M. Perissard, "But I have come to Bordeaux to open a branch office of which M. Merivel will be temporary manager. In a little while, when you undertsand our methods thoroughly, he will go to Marseilles and leave you in charge. Then we will double your salary and increase your share of the profits to fifteen per cent!"

Laroque wavered a moment, then suddenly straightened up to his feet and held out his hand.

"It's a bargain!" he said.

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING DOWER CLAIMS

When the partners had pawed over and patted their new employe like a couple of affectionate behemoths welcoming back their lost offspring, the elder suggested that they must now come to the business details of the first mission which was to be entrusted to him. Laroque resumed his seat and prepared to listen but they smiled at him in paternal reproof.

"Not here, my indiscreet friend!"

"*Most* cretainly not!"

The young man gazed at them astonished.

"Why, what's the matter with this place?" he demanded.

"Never discuss an important matter in detail within ear-shot of any wall, my dear young man!" smiled M. Perissard, shaking his head.

"*Most* certainly not!" affirmed his confrère, decidedly, "*Muribus aures*—ahem!—The Latin has it!"

Laroque rose and reached for his hat and coat with a smile of amusement.

"Well, where do you want to go?"

"We will seek a—ah—safe spot in the vicinity!" replied the senior partner. Laroque put his head in the dressing room and remarked that he was going out for a little while and the three allies departed.

M. Perissard led the way to a large café and selected a table in a not too prominent location but still where there was no chance of being overheard.

He ordered a bottle of Chateau Lafitte and expensive cigars, gave the waiter more than suitable pourboire and told him they would require nothing more. They were as much alone as they would have been on a South Sea atoll.

Three glasses were raised together and a little later three clouds of smoke arose from the table. M. Perissard gazed into his glass reflectively for a moment.

"You must understand, my dear Laroque," he began, "that our business is largely with those men who, in public or private life, are a menace to the well-being of society."

The adventurer nodded with a little smile of

weary cynicism. M. Merivel said something about "*latrones in officio.*"

"Imagine the shock, the grief to my colleague and myself," continued M. Perissard, "when we learned that a very high official of this fair city of France had falsified his accounts to the extent of one million francs, *at least!*"

If he expected to rouse his new employe to eager enthusiasm he was not disappointed. Laroque's face expressed it.

"His name I will disclose to you in due time," said M. Perissard, in reply to an unspoken question. "You are wondering how so a large a peculation can possibly be concealed and therefore be of any value to us.

"I will not conceal from you that the man is a power in this part of the country and has many rich and influential friends. He recently threw himself on the mercy of these and appealed to them for help. As they were under obligations of more or less doubtful character they could not fail to respond.

"They have now made up more than eight hundred thousand francs, I have reason to believe, and will have no difficulty in raising the balance. But there is no occasion for haste and he is all the more

useful to them while they still have this hold over him.

"Fortunately for the cause of civic and national purity—so dear to the heart of every true citizen of the Republic!—some of them were so indiscreet as to put part of the negotiations into the form of correspondence. A letter or two, quite providentially—"

"*Most* providentially!" interjected M. Merivel.

"—Fell into our hands. We made investigations in a quiet way, as was our duty, and have secured what is almost legal proof of this astounding corruption!"

Laroque, stretched back in his chair, with his gleaming eyes half-veiled by the drooping lids nodded almost imperceptibly as M. Perissard paused. M. Merivel shook his head in heavy sadness over the fresh proof of the wickedness of man and sipped his wine.

"Now, then," resumed M. Perissard. "Since they are so willing to come forward with the full amount of his shortage they will undoubtedly be only too glad to add fifty or seventy-five thousand francs to the amount to insure the utmost secrecy. Ah—you understand, now?"

Laroque slowly heaved himself upright in his

chair and rubbed his chin for a moment before replying.

"I understand, all right," he said doubtfully, "but if these friends of his can save him any time they choose, what is to prevent them from coming up with the money the moment we approach him?"

M. Perissard indulged him with another fatherly smile.

"Ah, my dear young sir, you don't quite understand as yet! If we go to the Public Prosecutor and lay our information in his hands he will have no way of knowing whether the money has been refunded without an official investigation, which will certainly ruin the gentlemen. For even if he escapes prison the fact that he is guilty of misconduct in office must be brought to light."

Laroque's face brightened.

"Ah, ha! I see!" he exclaimed, "It certainly begins to look promising!"

"*Most* promising!" rumbled M. Merivel.

Then they began to outline the details of the campaign, and it was late in the afternoon when M. Perissard suggested that there was nothing more to do.

"I need not impress upon you the necessity for

the utmost tact and caution in dealing with this gentleman," he said in conclusion. "You can see that in his position he has powerful official influence and we must be careful that he does not trip us. He is shrewd, bold and unscrupulous."

"*Most* unscrupulous!" affirmed M. Merivel.

"By the way," said his colleague, suddenly, "you aren't married, are you?"

"Lord! No!" laughed Laroque.

"That's all right!" said M. Perissard, approvingly.

"Women are charming creatures, but in business-s-s!" M. Merivel's hands, shoulders and eyebrows went up.

"I was afraid when I saw the lady and I meant to mention it sooner!"

"Most charming woman!" declared M. Merivel, unctuously, "Artistic! Good-looking!"

"I met her at Buenos Ayres," explained Laroque. "She hadn't a sou to bless herself with and was picking up a living around a café. There's no harm in her but she's taking a lot of trash—morphine, ether, opium and that sort of stuff—'to help her forget', she says. She's a married woman, you know. Wife of a man in a good position and quite a shining light at the bar. she says."

"Really!" exclaimed M. Perissard, with interest, and he exchanged a glance with his colleague.

"Yes," went on Laroque carelessly, "Deputy Attorney in Paris, I believe. She was false to him and he turned her out."

M. Merivel's upraised hands indicated that he was shocked.

"Oh dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he groaned with a sigh like the roar of a tornado, "Even the morals of our magistrates and leading lawyers are not above suspicion these degenerate days!"

"Have some more wine!" laughed Laroque, filling his glass. But M. Perissard hardly heard either of them.

"Was this long ago?" he demanded eagerly.

"Twenty years ago," replied the young man, settling back in his chair. "She says she went to England shortly after he turned her out. Since then she has been to America, Colombia, Brazil, all over the place—sometimes rich and sometimes poor. When I met her she was dying to get back to France and didn't have a centime, so I brought her with me. Never liked to travel alone," he added with a grin.

But the master of "confidential missions" did not smile.

"Did she tell you the story herself?" he persisted.

"Yes," nodded Laroque, "one day when she'd had a little more ether than usual. It's funny sort of stuff—that! She's a silent sort of woman as a rule, but when she's been drinking ether she gets talkative, and if she doesn't become maudlin over her past, she breaks out with a hellish temper and says anything. She won't live long. About worn out—poor tramp!"

M. Perissard listened attentively.

"I have been thinking," he said slowly, when Laroque had finished, "that if her husband was a Deputy Attorney in Paris twenty years ago, he may be Attorney General now."

"Indeed, yes!" his partner nodded emphatically.

"This might lead to business," pursued the other in the same thoughtful tone.

Laroque's face betrayed that he, too, had grown suddenly keenly interested.

"How?" he demanded.

"Supposing the husband is now occupying a position worth having," suggested the older man, "He would be likely to make a sacrifice to prevent scandal about his wife from becoming public property."

M. Merivel's fat countenance expressed the most exalted admiration.

"Isn't he a wonderful man?" he breathed ecstatically. "Always getting ideas like that! A benefactor of humanity! Most certainly a benefactor!"

But his partner and Laroque did not heed.

"Do you know her husband's name?" asked the former.

"No, she never told me that."

"How old would you take her to be?"

"Past forty."

"H'm! He must have been rather young for the position if he was near her age. You are sure she never mentioned his name?"

"I would have remembered it if she had," replied Laroque.

"H'm! Well, I don't know that it matters. A Deputy Attorney in Paris whose wife left him twenty years ago ought not be difficult to find."

"Do you think so?"

"Mere child's play, my dear boy! And I think," he added thoughtfully, "I think that, on the whole, this had better be your first piece of business. Ah! Wait!" he exclaimed with a sudden thought, "Did she ever mention that her

own people were wealthy at the time of her marriage?"

Laroque scratched his head in an effort to remember.

"No, I don't think she ever did," he said at last. "Why? It's the husband we'll have to see anyway? What have her people to do with it?"

"Why, don't you see," cried M. Perissard almost pityingly, "That if she is only a little past forty she must have married young and left her husband shortly afterward. The inference is that he was probably a young lawyer and without a great deal of money. He could not have married her unless she brought a *dot.*"

"Well?" demanded Laroque, not catching the other drift.

"Well, then! If he drove her out of the house she has a good claim to that money—unless he gave it to her then or later," he added anxiously. "Do you know?"

"I don't know whether she ever had a *dot,*" replied Laroque, as the scheme dawned on him, "but if she did I'm certain that she didn't take it away with her."

"Excellent! Excellent!" exclaimed M. Perissard, pressing the palms of his hands together.

"*Most* excellent! Wonderful man!" breathed M. Merivel, with an upward glance of thanksgiving.

"Now, then," continued the former briskly, "we will stay the hand of punishment temporarily in the matter of this official scoundrel and teach this magistrate or attorney-general, or whatever he is, that he cannot turn his wife out of his house and keep her money!"

"But," objected Laroque. "I think there is a child, though I'm not certain."

"Makes no difference whatsoever!" declared M. Perissard. "The money goes to the child upon the death of its mother—not before!" He glanced at his watch. "You go back and find out all that you can from the lady and we will wait for you here. You should be able to pump her thoroughly in an hour. That will give you plenty of time to catch the six-thirty train for Paris. You might as well begin on the work right away."

"*Most* certainly!" agreed M. Merivel, with a heavy nod. "*Nulla dies sine*—H'm!—the Latin, of course!"

"We will wait for you here and give you your final instructions," added M. Perissard, as Laroque

rose. "Oh, and try to get a power of attorney from her!" The latter nodded.

"I'll be back in an hour!" he promised, and with a wave of the hand he hurried out.

CHAPTER XII

"WHO SAVES ANOTHER —"

When the footsteps of the three protectors of society died away down the stairway of the Three Crowns, the woman opened the door of the dressing room and crept out.

"Thank God, they've gone!" she muttered, wearily, "I'd like to be alone always. People bore me to death. What a life! What a life!"

She walked across the room a trifle unsteadily and deposited her empty glass on the little table with the absinthe and sat down at the other one with her face to the door. She fumbled in a dingy hand-bag, slung to her left wrist, and presently produced a small vial, followed by a greasy pack of cheap cards.

None but the eyes of abiding love or undying hate would have seen in the pitiful, drug-ridden, half drunken, fast-sinking wreck any trace of the bewitching, laughing bride of twenty-odd years before. The austere ancient, who virtuously

wrote "the descent into hell is easy," might have read in her face a different story of that dark pathway.

She took a swallow of the fluid in the bottle and coughed sharply as she recorked it. The peculiar odor of ether spread through the room. Then she began shuffling the cards as if about to play solitaire. Suddenly she stopped, threw herself across the table, buried her face in her arms and burst into tears . . .

Our life is like some vast lake that is slowly filling with the stream of our years. As the waters creep surely upward the landmarks of the past are one by one submerged. But there shall always be one memory to lift its head above the tide until the lake is full to overflowing. In the calmness of our days it is little noted, but the tempest-lashed waters are swept upon it again and again. It may be but the memory of a moment when a woman looked into our eyes with trust, or it maybe that that trust was betrayed. But sweet or bitter, its ghost shall come in the hour of woe to whisper hope and solace, or to press more deeply the thorns into the anguished brow and add its weight to the burden of the cross. . . .

Far back over the path of those twenty years

Jacqueline had learned to hate her husband, but the memory and love of her boy grew stronger. She had sunk from indifference to degradation and from degradation to despair. She had been a man's joy of a year, his pleasure of a month and his plaything of an hour. But through it all the mother love had lived in the blackened soul and the mother heart—scarred and calloused as it was —yet yearned for her boy. But for this, the years of loathsome vice, of drink and drugs, would have brought at last the numbness of oblivion. She had sought it in vain. She had steeped herself in vice until at times the life within flickered dangerously. But it brought never a moment of forgetfulness. When she was sober, or not under the influence of drugs, she lived in the darkness of black despair. And when she turned to these "to help her forget," she did not know that that was not the reason. They revived and quickened the slowly numbing brain until she could feel again the wild anguish of hopeless loss; and as she sobbed out her agony she vaguely felt that she was again more nearly worthy to press her child to her breast.

In the past few months her enfeebled mind had gloated miserably over one dismal ray of hope—

the hope of one moment of joy before she died. She had learned from a half-breed woman in Caracas the art of telling fortunes with cards, and hour after hour she retold her future with the soiled pack that she always carried. They told her that the fleeting second of happiness would be bought at the price of one life, to be followed by the end of her own. To that promise she clung. . . .

The storm of weeping, as is the case with sobs that are due wholly or in part to drunkenness, ended as abruptly as it had begun. She took another swallow of the ether and began laying out the cards in the same weary seven rows. She looked over them quickly and wept again. Always the two deaths!

"Now, then," she straightened up with a snuffle, "I'll try again."

She was spreading them out once more when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she called, without looking up. The maid, Marie, entered with pen and ink and a form that the police require the hotel-keepers to have filled out and filed by every guest.

She advanced, a little timidly, to the table and said:

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, madame, but the police make us go through this business." She held up the blank form.

The woman looked up, puzzled for a moment, and then nodded.

"Oh, yes, well then—— Oh, write it yourself!" she snapped irritably, turning again to the cards. She took another drink of ether and looked up at the maid, as if she did not exactly remember the purpose of her visit.

"Monsieur and Madame Laroque," she said at last, listlessly, her eyes on the table. "From Buenos Ayres, on their way to Paris."

Marie filled in the blank.

"To Paris. Thank you, madame," she said. Then she stood looking curiously at the cards.

The woman raised her head.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, thank you. Are you telling fortunes with the cards?" Marie asked, timidly as the woman began studying the table once more.

"Yes."

"Then you really believe in them?"

"They're the only thing I do believe in," was the weary response.

"That's funny!" exclaimed the maid, with a

nervous little smile. "I don't believe in them at all!"

"You will!" was the grim comment.

"Oh, it's like palmistry and all that sort of thing. It's all nonsense."

Jacqueline looked up at her pityingly.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" she declared, a little thickly. The ether and absinthe were beginning to work more powerfully.

"What do the cards tell you?" asked Marie, growing interested. Jacqueline gazed over the table again.

"Always the same thing, always the same thing!" she said, with a glassy stare, meant to be impressive. "Death! My own death! And it's coming very soon. That's what the cards tell me!"

The maid's eyes opened wide.

"Really!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"They never change!" the woman went on in a dull monotone. Dissipation had left little of expression and given much of harshness to her voice. "I can see blood—a great deal of blood! But before I die I shall see the two people that I always see in my dreams, waking or sleeping—the man I love more than anything else in the world

and the man I hate more than anything else in the world! The cards have been promising me for the last three months that I shall see them soon and that—I'll die! The cards have never been wrong, and that's why I wanted to get back to France."

"You believe in them as much as that?" asked the maid, wonderingly.

"Yes!"

She watched her rearranging the cards for some moments in silence.

"Won't you tell my fortune?" she asked at last with a little hesitation.

"What's the good if you don't believe?" retorted the woman, without looking up.

"Oh, I don't be—I don't believe in it," she stammered with a slight blush, "but I—I—do believe in it!"

Jacqueline glanced at her with the dispassionate, rolling gaze of a drunkard.

"Sit down!" she commanded. While Marie was settling herself on the edge of the bed she took another drink of the ether.

"Is that ether you're drinking?" asked the girl.

"Ye—yes!" coughed the woman, slipping in the cork.

"It smells horribly strong! What does it do to you?" she inquired, with shuddering curiosity.

"It changes my ideas and that's a good deal," was the grim reply. "But it gets on my nerves sometimes and then I cry or smash the furniture." Marie started.

"But that doesn't matter! What do you want to know?"

"Oh, but if I tell you that," smiled the maid, cunningly, "there'll be nothing in your telling my fortune, will there?"

"Don't tell me anything!" mumbled Jacqueline, shuffling the cards and spreading them out once more. She studied them in dead silence for a minute or more. Then:

"You're married!" she announced.

"Oh, there's nothing in that!" sniffed Marie. "You saw my ring."

"You have a child."

"Yes, the darling! Seven months old."

"You're in love."

The maids cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Yes! Yes!" she exclaimed.

"But not with your husband."

She straightened up.

"No, I should think not!" she exclaimed, almost indignantly.

"You are going to leave your husband!" went on the dull, even voice. Marie's cheeks paled and she gasped but did not reply. Jacqueline looked up slowly.

"Is it true?"

"Yes! it's quite true!" was the low reply in an awed tone. Then she added by way of justification: "My husband is Victor, the boots, who brought up your luggage."

"He seems to be a good fellow," remarked the woman, indifferently.

"Yes," the girl sniffed contemptuously, "but he's such a common sort of man!"

"And the other?" There was awakening interest in the stupid eyes and dull voice.

"Oh, the other is a gentleman! A real gentleman!" cried Marie, clasping her hands joyously. "He's a commercial traveler—in soap! He dresses beautifully and he smells—ah—m-m! I am to meet him to-night at the Grand Café, opposite the theater, and to-morrow we shall be fa-a-r-away!"

"And your baby?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"He's out to nurse," she replied, "and I know his father will not let him want for anything!"

Jacqueline consulted the bottle again.

"Look here, my girl! You're going to make a fool of yourself!" she declared with drunken bluntness. "Take my tip and stay with your husband! Be false to him if you must, but stay with him!"

"No, no! I love no one in the world but Anatole!" cried the girl, melodramatically. "And I'm going away with him to-night!"

"Well, you'll suffer in the long run!" was the other's grim assurance, with something of a return of her usual indifference.

"No, I shan't! Anatole loves the very ground I walk on!" declared Marie, proudly.

"H'mph! He may now, but it won't last," retorted the woman. "Your lover will leave and you'll take another—and then a third and fourth, and you'll see what sort of a life that means. I *know!*"

The girl opened her pretty eyes wide.

"Do you?" she asked, with a little shiver of awe.

"Yes! I was about your age when I left my husband and my child. I hate my husband.

God! How I hate him!" she burst out, her eyes blazing with insane fury, her clenched fists above her head. Marie half started toward the door, fearing that one of the furniture-breaking moods was coming on. But as suddenly the voice dropped back to its toneless level and the eyes dulled. "But I'm dying because my child is not with me. Child! Why, he must be a man of twenty-four now, and I'm sure he's a tall, handsome fellow that everybody loves and admires. Just think of it! I might be walking down the street—now—on his arm! Wouldn't I be proud! And I don't even know him. I think of him night and day—all the time I think of him. And if he came into this room now I wouldn't know him. But I shall see him again!" she cried, excitedly, clutching the cards. "I'm sure of that! I know it! But—but I shall not—be able to—kiss him—and press him to my heart. He'll never know who I am!"

Jacqueline shook her head with a solemnity born of the stimulants, and went on thickly:

"I'd be ashamed! He might despise me or reproach me, and I couldn't stand that. He—he—thinks I died years ago and—and I'm glad of it. Oh, Raymond! My boy, my laddie!" And again there was a quick burst of tears.

Marie sprang up hastily and hurried over to the table, touching the sobbing woman gently on the arm.

"Oh, madame! Don't cry, don't cry!" she pleaded, with clumsy sympathy.

"Better be warned by my case!" wept the woman, in a high, queer voice. "You're a pretty girl—now—but you—won't be long! Your lover'll leave you as mine left me! Men—soon get tired. I used to be pretty, too!"

The girl began to cry at the sight of the other's distress.

"I'm sure Anatole will never leave me!" she whimpered.

Jacqueline's tears stopped as suddenly as if they had been turned off at a spigot and she sat up, rigid.

"Then you're a d——d fool!" she snapped. Marie wept more bitterly.

And then—God knows how!—as she stared at the sobbing girl, somewhere in her warped soul the ether found a spark of womanly pity and fanned it to a little flame of weak resolve. . . . "He saved others. Himself he could not save. . . ."

"Sit down!" she commanded, harshly. "And let me tell you a story, and maybe it will save you some of the suffering that I went through."

CHAPTER XIII

FROM OUT THE SHADOW

Jacqueline brushed the cards to one side, coughed over the ether bottle again and lit another cigarette. The girl settled herself, snuffling on the edge of the bed and wiped her eyes. When she looked up the woman was leering at her contemptuously.

"S'pose you think you're beautiful, don't you?" she demanded scornfully, slurring huskily over the words. "S'pose you think you see why anybody'd grow tired of me, but you're different, eh? Let me tell you, m'girl, when I was your age, if anybody'd put us side by side, there's no man in the world would ha' looked at you twice!"

And she glared at her as if daring her to deny it.

"Not a man in the world!" she repeated, proudly, fixing her bleared eyes on the girl's fresh, young face. "Why, my lovers used to tell that—— But that's not what I wanted to tell you! Let me see! What was it?" her eyes wan-

dered and she frowned. The ether was sweeping over her in waves. "Oh, yes! I wanted to tell you that's it's all right 'bout your husband. Don't pay any attention to this rot about being true to him. Nobody cares anything 'bout husbands! Husbands are no good! No good! I could have a dozen husbands!" Her head sank and she waved her hand feebly as if dismissing the whole tribe of married men. The mumbled words died away in incoherencies.

The girl watched her a little frightened.

"You were going to tell me a story," she reminded her timidly.

Jacqueline sat bolt upright, her eyes blazing with senseless anger.

"Of course, I am!" she snapped. "You shut up and le' me tell it my own way an' maybe it'll do you some good!" Marie shrank back and glanced nervously at the door.

"But that's all right!" the woman assured her generously. "You didn't mean anything wrong. I'm going t' tell you why you better not go 'way and leave your boy like I did. . . ."

She bowed her head again for a moment and, spurred by the drug, her memory slowly unfolded the panorama of her past. All its happiness, all

its sorrow, misery and despair came back to her. As she told the tale her voice was sometimes harsh and indifferent and sometimes only a drunken mumble. Again it was faintly vibrant with the ghost of a lost emotion, or the knife-thrust of reawakened grief cut off the words in her throat. And the simple girl on the bed leaned forward and listened with glistening eyes and hectic cheeks. . . .

"Twenty-five—twenty-six—I don't know how many years ago—I lived in a big house not many miles from this place," she began, slowly. "I was the only child and I don't remember much about my father and mother. They died young. It was a small place and I didn't know much about life—but I learned plenty afterwards.

"You're a peasant," she went on with harsh contempt. "You don't know anything about how girls like I was, are brought up. When I was sixteen I knew only two young men more than to bow to when I met them. One was named Noel—I'd known him all my life—and the other's name was—Louis!" The liquid word came gratingly off her tongue.

"He was older than Noel and he was one of these grave, dignified young men, all wrapped up

in his work. He was a lawyer and I guess he was a pretty good one. Everybody seemed to think so. Well, anyway, we fell in love with each other, and I married him before I was nineteen. Maybe the other one loved me, too," she added, carelessly. "He tried to kill himself a little while after I married his friend.

"After our honeymoon we took a house in Paris, where his work was. He was ambitious and wanted to be a Deputy Attorney. I didn't see much of him after we settled down, because he was giving so much time to his work, but I didn't care much—then. I loved him so and—I had something else to think about. And when *he* came I was the happiest girl in Paris. He was the prettiest, little, dark-eyed——" The sentence ended in a choke and she put out her hand for the ether bottle. . . .

"For a while the baby was everything to me, but he couldn't be always. I wanted my husband. I liked fun and a gay time, but he was always too busy—too busy!—until I grew angry at him. He thought that the baby and the little that I saw of him in the evening occasionally were all that I needed.

"Sometimes when he was working in his study I

used to go in and try to talk to him and get him to tell me what he was doing. I wanted to be more in his life. He always laughed and said that I wouldn't understand and—then he'd turn me out.

"I begged him to take me to the theater, to the carnival, to the country—anywhere for life and amusement—but he never had time. I used to cry myself to sleep at night.

"One evening he brought home a young man to dinner with him. They were very happy. My husband had saved the young man in some case or other—he never took the trouble to tell me, or I forget what it was. He was a witty, handsome fellow, and that was the merriest dinner I ever had.

"The young man—his name was Albert—seemed to have a pretty good time himself, for he came often after that. I suppose my fool of a husband," she grated the word viciously, "thought that he was coming all the time to show his gratitude! One afternoon while he was there, I wanted to go driving and he asked Albert to take me—so he could go on with his d——d work!

"That's the way he discovered how to keep me amused and without interfering with his own

plans. Albert was always my escort after that, and the more my husband neglected me the angrier I grew. He didn't have brains enough to know that no man devotes his time to a married woman out of gratitude to her husband.

"Albert was always respectful—oh, yes, always respectful! But he could tell a lot with his eyes, and the more enraged I was with my husband the more I listened to what his eyes were saying. Once, in a carriage, he picked up my gloves and kissed them again and again. But he never spoke a word of love or put a disrespectful finger on me. Oh, he knew women, he did! He knew women!" she chuckled, tipsily.

"I had one of the first editions of every new book. There were flowers every day. He had me in a box at the opening of every new play. Once I mentioned that I would like to have some real white heather to make birthday favors. I didn't see him for four days and then he came out to the house with a trunk-load, nearly. He had gone to Scotland for it. D'you ever have a lover'd do that for you?" she demanded, with a fierce frown.

"You bet you didn't!" she went on proudly, while Marie was trying to imagine Anatole en

route for Scotland. "That's the kind of lovers I had!

"Well, one Sunday I wanted my husband to go to Fontainebleau with me and he wouldn't do it That was the finish! Albert saw something—for he began to make love to me. When I felt his first kiss on my hand, I started! I was about to jerk it away, when I remembered how my husband had treated me and I let him go on. Ah! he knew how to make love!" she declared, with the admiration of a savant.

"When I returned to my husband that night, I was frightened! I knew that I cared for Albert more than I should and I wanted him to protect me. When I tried to talk to him he told me to run along and play with Albert! And I did! I went! I went! I went! I——" The voice trailed off into a sob. She buried her face in her arms for a few moments and the table shook. The girl on the bed was in a semi-hypnotic trance and did not stir. When Jacqueline raised her head her face was set in its usual stony mask.

"When I came back that night," her voice was hard and high, "I was no longer a pure woman. I crept into bed and wept, afraid that my husband would question me when he came to say good-

night. He didn't come. He was thinking about one of his problems and forgot it. All my remorse was gone in a moment. I didn't think of him or my boy. I was mad—crazy! I gave myself up to Albert without a thought of the future!

"But it didn't last long!" she wagged her head solemnly. "My husband came home too early one night and found us in my room. Never should ha' been there! Never! Never, never! But I thought I hated him so much that I wanted to be untrue to him in his own house. Well, when he opened the door he just stood there and looked at us for a minute and didn't say a word. Then he went off down the hall toward his study. We ran down-stairs and out of the house and——" She stopped, her eyes wavering and her face wrinkling, as the absinthe or the ether apparently sketched a humorous picture on her mind.

"Hee! Hee!" she cackled hysterically. "I'll bet he was surprised when he came back! Hee, hee, hee! I never thought of that! Hee, hee, hee! Ha, ha, ha! I never—ha, ha, ha!" And she rocked back and forth in uncanny mirth until the laughter changed to sobs. Then she stiffened suddenly and tried to glare at Marie with watery eyes.

"What you laughing at? S'there anything funny?" she demanded, belligerently. The frightened girl, who had not made a sound, began a stammering protest. She was too much fascinated by the evil story and its creepy narrator to think of rushing out of the room.

"'S all right! All right! But don't do it again," Jacqueline warned her. "Now, le' me see! Oh, yes! Well, Albert and I went down South and bought a little place in the country and lived there for a long time. Happy? No, I wasn't happy! I wanted my boy. My boy! My boy!" And again she burst into tears.

"I hadn't been there but a little more than a year," she went on, snuffling and wiping her eyes, "when I told him I couldn't live without my baby and I was going to ask my husband to forgive me. He begged me not to do it, and for months I was afraid to try. At last, he took pneumonia and died.

"I wrote three letters to my husband, asking him to see me, and he never answered. That made me all the more afraid to meet him, and I don't think I would ever have had the courage if I had not overheard a conversation between two men in a café one evening. They had just come

from Paris. They were lawyers, and one of them was wondering at my husband's strength. He said that my boy had been dangerously ill, and that my husband was beside his bed all night, but in Court every day as usual.

"When I heard that my baby might be dying I nearly swooned; and, before I had recovered, the two men were gone. I called a cab and drove to the railway station as fast as I could, and within a few hours I was in Paris. Nearly all of my fear of my husband was gone in my grief about my baby and I hurried to the house where we had lived as fast as a horse could go. When I got there I found that he had moved to Passy shortly after I—I left him. It was late in the evening when I found the place."

Jacqueline paused and her head sank slowly on to the table. After a few moments she sat up and reached feverishly for the ether bottle.

"The—hugh!—maid knew—hugh! hugh—knew me," she coughed, "but I begged her to tell my husband that a woman wanted to see him, without giving him my name. When he came in he tried to put me out of the house without listening to me. I groveled at his feet and begged him to let me see my boy! I told him how I had suffered

and how bitterly I had repented the wrong I had done him, and for a time I thought he would yield and forgive me. But when I told him that my lover was dead he thought that was the only reason that I had returned to him and he went mad with rage. In spite of my tears and struggles he pushed me out of the house and—and—and—I had lost—my boy—forever! . . ."

"You remember that, d'you hear?" she demanded. "You can kill a man, and if you've any sort of reason everybody may forgive. But if you're untrue to your husband—it doesn't make any difference how much reason you have—everybody'll kick you. . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

SIC ITUR AD AVERNO

Jacqueline fumbled in the box for another cigarette and held it, unlighted, in her hand as she went on.

"I don't remember much what happened for the next few hours after that. I must have found my way back to Paris somehow, because while it was still dark I was standing at the edge of an embankment looking into the Seine.

"It was raining and my clothes were wet through and through. I didn't know what I was doing or how I got there. A light on the other side threw a reflection across, almost to my feet; and, as I looked down, I saw my baby in the water!"

Her voice had dropped until it was barely audible across the room, and she leaned toward Marie, her eyes shining with an insane light.

"I s'pose you think I'm crazy, eh? Couldn't

have seen? Well, you don't know all about babies, my girl!

"D'you ever see your baby in the river?" she demanded, with hoarse fierceness. The girl's only reply was a dry sob and a shudder.

"Well, you will if you run away with that d——d soap peddler of yours," she grumbled, settling back in her chair. . . .

"I was just going to get into the river and take him in my arms when someone caught hold of my wrist and I heard a man's voice asking, 'Are you ill, madame?'

"I don't know what I said, but he put his arm through mine, led me into a little café where he made me drink some brandy before he would let me say a word. Then he called a cab and asked me where I lived.

"In the light of the café I had a chance to look at him when the brandy made me feel a little warmer. I knew by his accent that he was an Englishman. He had curly brown hair and a pink and white skin—altogether a nice-looking young man! He seemed to be less than thirty, and he talked and acted toward me as he would have if I had been his sister.

"When the cab came he wanted to take me

home in it. I told him that I had no place to go and begged him to go away and leave me. He sat down again and I don't remember how much of my story I told him.

"He told me afterward that I fainted in the cab; but when I could understand things clearly once more, I was lying in a big soft bed in a beautifully furnished room. There were pictures and statues and heavy draperies everywhere. Foils and arms and books were scattered about. There was a little table covered with bottles beside my bed and a nurse sitting near by. When she saw that I was awake she told me that I was in the Englishman's apartment and that I had been delirious for three weeks.

"In a little while he came in and told me how he had brought me home and had sent for a doctor and nurse. The doctor said that I had narrowly escaped brain fever. I went to sleep again in a little while and did not wake until the next day. The nurse stayed less than a week after that and he came into my room and read and talked to me by the hour. He told me all about himself. He was the son of a wealthy English family and had developed a love for painting which he had ample money to cultivate.

"He was a bright, cheerful young fellow, and in his company and through his care I grew strong rapidly. He never asked me to tell him one word about my past or my plans for the future. When I was able to sit up comfortably in bed he brought his easel into the room and painted me. He was given honorable mention for it.

"All this time I was worrying about what I was to do when I grew strong enough to leave his rooms. I made up my mind that I would try to find work of some sort in the millinery shops. One day I mentioned to him that I would be leaving in a short time, and he looked very grave and asked me what I intended doing. I told him and he approved of the plan. In all this time he had not as much as given me a passionate glance.

"He insisted, when I was able to go out, that I should make my home there, until I was established in a place where I could make a living, and loaned me the money to get clothes that I needed. I did not love him, but I worshipped him for his goodness.

"It was disappointing work—trying to find employment, and I could not make enough to live on decently. I had never had to be very careful of money before, and I did not know how. He

advised me, and helped me, cheered me all he could, and we ate supper together every night.

"I was making a few francs a week trimming hats, and when we began telling our experiences of the day those little suppers were almost merry. I was learning to hate my husband with a hate that will be with me till I die," and the glow of her dark eyes put the seal of truth on the words, "and when John—my Englishman—told his jokes and blunders, the pain of the longing for my boy did not hurt so much.

"Then I lost my miserable position, and it was days before I got another, although it was a better one when I did find it. During that time he was even more thoughtful and attentive and did not give me a chance to feel hopeless very long.

"The night, after I went to work again, we were sitting in the room where I had lain ill and he was telling me, with many laughs, about a picture that a fellow student was painting. As I watched his clean, handsome face and listened to his cheery talk I thought of all that he had done for me—that he had asked for nothing and received nothing but my empty words of gratitude—and my eyes filled with tears. The next moment I was kneeling before his chair, kissing his hands. . . .

"His story stopped with a gasp, and I felt him tremble. Then he drew his hands away and raised me up to him and I kissed his lips and eyes and hair again and again. And . . . that night . . . I gave him . . . all I had . . . to give! . . .

"He never really loved me, but he was happy with me for a long time, and when he went back to England he took me with him. His home was only a few hours' ride from London, where he found apartments for me, and he was with me more than he was at home.

"Finally his visits were not so frequent and regular and they kept falling off, until once I did not see him for nearly three weeks. When he came he told me he had to tell me something that he was sure would hurt me, but he couldn't help it. He had fallen in love with an English girl, whom he had known all his life, and hoped to marry her; so he would have to break with me. He was always very liberal in money matters, and he wanted to keep on sending me the same allowance that he had given me when I settled in London. But I was too proud—then—to take it. I gathered together what money I had saved, packed my clothes and left that day.

"I took a cheap room and started out to find

work again. I was given a place as clerk in a millinery store and by living as carefully as I could I did not have to draw often on my savings. But I had to draw on them a little and I was beginning to feel reckless, when an American theatrical man, who was spending part of the summer in England, came into the store one day to buy some ladies' gloves. I waited on him, and—well, in a few days I left my cheap room, and that fall I went back to New York with him.

"He wasn't as careful of my feelings as the Englishman was—— You'll find that out, too, my girl," she broke off, with a grin of drunken cynicism. "After the first two or three, your lovers don't think much about your feelings. He left me destitute in less than a month after we got to New York!

"I tried to get work but I couldn't. The woman where I roomed took all of my clothes, except those I had on, to pay for my room, and turned me out. I walked the streets all that night and the next day without anything to eat, and the next night I stopped a well-dressed man and asked him if he could give me enough money to get some food. He walked on as if he had not heard me, and then next instant a man stepped out of a doorway and told me I was under arrest!

"He took me to a police station where I spent the rest of the night in cell, and the next morning I was taken to court. The detective who had arrested me told the judge that he had seen me speak to a strange man on the street, and the judge gave me my choice of paying a fine of twenty-five francs or going to prison for a month. I tried to explain that I had had nothing to eat for two days and that I had only asked the man for a little money, but they would not listen to me. Just as they were about to take me away to prison, as I had seen them take three or four other girls before me, a young man, very stylishly dressed, came forward and said that he would pay my fine. The clerk took his money and he led me out of the court-room.

"When we were outside I tried to thank him, but I was so weak with hunger and weariness that I could hardly speak or stand. He took me to a little restaurant a few steps away and made me eat until I felt that I would never be hungry again. During breakfast he learned that I was alone, friendless and penniless, and he said he would help me. I went with him and he took me to his room where . . . we stayed all day!

"That night he took me out, saying that he

would get me a room of my own. We went to a nice-looking house not far from one of the main streets of the city where a pleasant woman met us at the door. He asked me to sit down while he explained about me to the woman and when she came in to show me to my room she was very kind. The next morning my clothes were gone from my room and there was nothing in their place but a low-cut wrapper that I couldn't wear on the street. I was a prisoner. . . .

"I was in that house for more than a year and I made sometimes seventy-five—a hundred—a hundred and fifty francs in a day and a night, but I was never allowed to keep any of the money. The woman took part of it and the man who brought me there got the rest. I was on the point of trying to run away two or three times, but the girls in the house told me that I would be arrested and sent to prison and would have to come back to him in the end. Several of them had tried when they were first made slaves. . . . "

The voice that had been dispassionate, almost impersonal through the latter part of the story, suddenly ceased. Jacqueline gulped at the ether bottle again and lit the cigarette she had been holding in her fingers. She was silent so long that

Marie looked up at her, with something between a sob and a shudder.

"Is that all?" she half whispered.

The woman once more burst into a harsh, eerie laugh.

"All! All!" she repeated with drunken scorn. "Oh, hell! That's only the beginning! Where d'you s'pose I've been for the last fifteen years? —Well, I've been where you'll be if you run off with your soap peddler!" and she glared wickedly.

"I was sent all over the country" she went on, "always living the same life, and always with a different master. At last I got back to New York and had to go on the streets to make a living for myself and money for the man that owned me. One night, when my feet were wet with rain and I was cold all through, a girl showed me that an opium pill would make me feel better.

"After that I was never without some sort of drug, but I found out that ether is the best. Ether is the best!" And her eyes rested lovingly on the little bottle.

"I don't know how many years I was in the 'land of the free.' I'd have been about as well off there as anywhere else if it hadn't been for a lot of fool-women who were always trying to save me.

There's a lot of women over there that have plenty of money and nothing to do, and instead of doing nothing they keep sticking their noses into other people's business. I'd like to choke some of 'em!" she blazed out viciously.

"Save me!" she sneered with her mirthless laugh. "They got hold of me once when I was arrested and gave me a place where I could make twenty-five or thirty francs a week if I worked hard. All the time they looked at me and acted as if I was some new sort of a wild beast. When they put me in that work-shop they all called and said, 'Now, you're all right!'

"'All right!' I could hardly help laughing in their faces. They couldn't put my boy in my arms nor clean the stain from my body or drive the hell out of my soul, but they thought that twenty-five francs a week ought to be a good substitute for all three. It wouldn't much more than buy my food and whiskey and drugs. And because I left I was 'incorrigible' and they sent me to prison——!

"When I was released the man that was collecting my money at that time told me that I wouldn't be of any more use to him in New York and he sold me to a man who was taking some women to South America. It isn't hard to get a lover in South

America, and I had been there only a little while when I was free. Then I roamed around from one city to another, sometimes with one man, sometimes with another, until I met—this"—she nodded toward the door—"in Buenos Ayres. A woman in a dance-hall at Caracas taught me how to tell fortunes with cards, and when I learned that I had not long to live and would see my boy before I died I wanted to get back to France. He brought me."

There was a long silence, broken only by the sound of Marie's soft weeping. Jacqueline looked at her reflectively.

"Now, you're going to go the same way I did," she went on with a solemn air, born of the stimulants. "Remember what I tell you, m'girl. When you run away with that man you're through with being a decent, happy woman! I was an aristocratic prostitute once. You'll never be anything but a common one! Nobody'll try to stop you. Women'll be a sight harder on you than men. The men'll amuse themselves with you and push you a little farther down, but the women'll push you down and swear at you while they're doing it!——Well?"

"I'm sure—Anatole—will never—leave me!" sobbed the girl. Jacqueline gazed at her as if try-

ing to decide whether it were worth while to continue the argument. Then the ether moved her to impatient anger.

"All right, you d——d fool!" she snapped, "Get out of here!"

Marie rose, weeping more loudly and bitterly.

"Isn't there—something—I can do for you?"

"No! Get out!"

As the door closed behind the girl Jacqueline's head fell on the table with a long convulsive sob. She was silent for a long time and then, sitting up, she turned once more to the cards.

CHAPTER XV

THE SWELLING OF JORDAN

Laroque almost skipped with delight as he hurried back to the Three Crowns. The prospect of making plenty of money without working for it acted like champagne on his restless, reckless mind. Before he had walked a hundred steps he was building air-castles to be inhabited four or five years hence. He had no intention of remaining long as an employe of Messrs. Perissard and Merivel. The pay was good and the percentage of the two "missions" that had already been unfolded to him would be larger. He told himself that the first really big sum of money that he collected he would brazenly put in his pocket and whistle at the partners. Then he would buy out a small café somewhere in a paying neighborhood and settle down to a life of ease.

And if the woman at the hotel had really brought her husband a dower of considerable size, as Perissard's logic seemed to prove, here was the chance made right to his hand. He would get the money,

abandon the woman, and the rest of his years would be a pathway of ease.

So he sprang up the stairs, three at a time and threw open the door of the room, singing a song of the dance-halls. Jacqueline glanced up as he came in and then went on with her reading of the future.

He tossed his hat on to the bed, kicked a chair up to the table and dropped into it with a cheery:

"Do you know, old girl, this man Perissard is a wonderful old chap?"

"Is he?" she asked, absent-mindedly, without raising her head.

"I should think he was!" was the enthusiastic response. "Brimful of ideas!"

"Has he got anything for you?"

"Rather! He's offered me a place in his office?"

"What does he do in his office?"

"Oh—business!"

At the evasive reply, Jacqueline raised her head curiously.

"What kind of business?" she asked, with a trace of interest in the thick voice.

"Oh, business of all kinds! He really is an extraordinary man! Do you know, the moment he set eyes on you he saw that you were a woman of good family?"

These were the first words that she seemed to hear clearly, and her face displayed a foolish smile of gratified vanity.

"Did he really?"

"Yes! 'There's blood in her,' he said," went on Laroque, impressively. "Those were the very words he used."

Jacqueline raised the ether bottle.

"Here's his health!" she cried, taking another drink.

"I told him he could go and bet on it!" continued Laroque.

"You—you didn't tell him—who I was!" exclaimed Jacqueline, a dawning fright in her bleared eyes. She had forgotten for the moment that Laroque did not really know.

"Not much!" was the emphatic reply. "No," he laughed. "I told him, after making him promise to keep it secret, that you were the daughter of a general—that your father and mother were very rich—that your husband was a marquis and you had brought him 300,000 francs on your marriage!"

Jacqueline's hysterical cackle was added to his laugh.

"That's good! Veree good!" she chuckled. "And he b'lieved it, did he?"

"Every word of it! What do you think of that? Three hundred thousand francs! Ha, ha! And I suppose you didn't bring him a sou, did you?"

Jacqueline fell into the trap without a thought. She stiffened with drunken dignity.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, with a haughtiness somewhat impaired by her difficulty of enunciation. "I did not bring my husband 300,000 francs on my marriage, certainly! But I did bring him 125,000!"

Laroque hid the gleam in his eyes.

"Oh, nonsense! You're joking!" he laughed, "125,000 francs!"

"I 'sure you it's true!" declared Jacqueline, solemnly.

"Tut, tut! You're stretching it some!"

"Not a sou—more nor less!"

"Truth and honor?" he cried, laughing and raising his hand in the gesture of the oath.

"Truth *an'* honor!"

"A hundred and twenty-five thousand francs?"

"A hundred and twenty-five thousand francs!" And she nodded her head with heavy importance.

"Then where's the money?" he suddenly demanded. Jacqueline stared at him in mild surprise.

"Wha'd'you mean?"

"Did your husband give the money back to you?" His voice had changed from a bantering tone to excited harshness.

"No, of course not!" she replied roughly.

Laroque sprang up, pretended anger in his face.

"I can't believe you were such a fool as that! Do you mean to tell me that when your husband turned you out you didn't ask him for the money?"

"The money's not mine!" she mumbled, her eyes wandering.

"Whose is it, then?"

"My son's!" The words were barely audible.

"But you're alive still!" he protested angrily. "Your son will get it when you die!"

"My son thinks I'm dead," she replied, wearily. "His father told him I was. And when he was twenty-one he probably came into my fortune."

Laroque half-turned away with a quick gesture of impatience.

"What a fool you are!" he cried, disgustedly. "I don't suppose he saw a sou of it!" He was racking his mind for some lure that would draw her husband's name from her. But this last lead was fatal. Jacqueline glared at him suddenly, her eyes wild.

"What the hell's it to you?" she blazed out

fiercely. "You've got nothing to do with it, have you? What business is it o' yours, anyway?"

"But you ought to clear it up!" protested Laroque, in a milder tone, as he saw that he had erred. "That's what Perissard thinks, and Perissard knows what he's talking about."

"What business is it of Perissard's?" she shouted. Laroque extended his hands soothingly.

"He only spoke in your interests!" he hastily explained. "When I told him you had brought your husband 300,000 francs, he asked me whether you had got them back again. I said I didn't know, and he declared that you had a perfect right to the money."

"Well, I shan't claim it!" declared Jacqueline, sullenly sinking back into her chair.

"Why not?" he persisted.

"Because I don't—want to!"

"But why?"

Jacqueline burst into tears again.

"I'd rather beg in the streets!" she wept in a high whine. "I'd rather starve in the gutter than ask that man for a sou!"

"Yes! yes! Of course, I understand that!" he agreed, eagerly. "That's natural pride, that is! But you might get somebody else to get your

money for you. You might give somebody the power of attorney."

The sobs stopped abruptly and she stared at him in drunken scorn.

"Signed with my name and address, eh? No, thanks!"

"Well, a letter then," he suggested. "I should think a letter would do just as well. Look here! Give me a letter and I'll go and get your money for you!"

"I'd rather die than let my son know I'm alive!" she cried, her voice hoarse with passion and weeping. "He's not to know at any price! I'd rather kill myself! Yes, I would! Kill myself!"

"But he'll never know!" protested Laroque. He was fairly dancing with excitement. But Jacqueline apparently did not hear him.

"If he ever thinks of me," she went on between raging and sobbing, "I want him to regret me and I want him to feel sorry now and then because I'm not with him. He never knew me! I want him to respect my memory and love me!"

"Now, don't get excited!" interrupted Laroque soothingly.

"I don't want him to know what kind of a woman his mother is. And he shan't know it!"

she shouted with sudden fury. "He shall never know it, I tell you! *Never!* I tell you! *Never!*"

"All right! Don't lose your temper! Who on earth is going to tell him? I certainly won't, and it isn't likely his father will."

Jacqueline sank back into her chair and glowered at him.

"I don't want to talk about it any more!"

"But the money's worth the trouble!" he insisted, trying to hide his exasperation.

"D——n the money!"

"A hundred and twenty-five thousand francs! Think what a difference they'd make to us!"

"Oh, shut your d——d mouth!" she growled. "I don't want to talk about the money, I tell you!"

Laroque's eyes sparkled.

"Look here, my girl!" he cried, threateningly. "You keep a civil tongue in your head or I'll teach you who you're talking to!"

Jacqueline measured him with that boundless contempt that is given only the very drunk to feel.

"You can't teach me any more than I know about you!" she retorted with unmistakably insulting meaning.

Laroque elected to ignore this last thrust and ostentatiously looked at his watch.

"Will you write me a letter so I can get the money?" he demanded with an air of finality.

"*No!*" she screamed. He took off his coat and vest and went into the dressing-room with the remark that "he could do without the letter."

Jacqueline did not at first catch its significance but an idea slowly worked into her brain.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Oh, there's no trouble about finding a Deputy Attorney!" was the cheerful reply, accompanied by noise of splashing. She rose unsteadily.

"What are you doing in there?"

"Dressing."

"Are you going out?"

"Yes, my girl, I'm going out."

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"To Paris," he replied, calmly, through the open door.

"This evening?"

"Right away!"

"Then I'll come with you!" she declared, determinedly.

"No, you won't!" he replied, coolly, returning into the room. "Perissard objects."

Jacqueline faced him with dilated eyes.

"You're not to try and find my husband!" she cried, between anger and dread. She swayed on her feet. The thick slur had disappeared from her voice in the instant.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Laroque, picking up his hat and coat, "and I'll mind mine!"

"You are not to ask him for that money!" she cried, her voice rising shrilly.

"I'll do just as I like!" he sneered. Jacqueline clutched the lapel of his coat with both hands and glared into his face with blazing eyes.

"You shall not go!" she screamed furiously.

"What kind of a fool do you think I am?" he cried, roughly, trying to break away from her grip. "Who'll stop me?"

Jacqueline, with clenched teeth, clung grimly to his coat.

"Take care, my girl!" he cried, threateningly, as he tried to wrench his coat out of her hands. "Take care or you'll regret it!"

"You shall not go, I tell you! You shan't go into that house and see my child. I won't let you go!"

Laroque jerked his coat out of her grip and in the same motion threw her violently against the bed.

"Let me alone!" he snarled, and stalked into the dressing-room to get his traveling bag.

Jacqueline lurched to her feet and staggered over toward the hall door. . . . The room was reeling around her in crimson streaks. He must not pass that door! At the price of her life, he must not pass that door! . . . There was no key! . . . He would go and tell her husband of her shame! . . . Her boy would blush now for the mother, for whose memory he had wept. . . . Crazed with rage and horror and drugs she put her back to the door and stared helplessly around the room. The dresser was at her right, and there within easy reach was his revolver! With a gasp she clutched it as Macbeth might have reached for the phantom dagger. . . . What was his life compared with the thought that her boy would know his mother's shame? . . . She heard him coming and hid the revolver in the folds of her skirt.

Bag in hand, he walked briskly up to the door and attempted to push her to one side.

"No! You shan't go! you shan't go!" she panted, struggling.

"We'll see!" he laughed, derisively, getting his hand on the knob.

"Take care!"

"Don't be a fool!" he snarled. "Get out of the way or I'll *make* you!"

And at the word he shoved her roughly against the foot of the bed. With an effort she regained her balance.

"*There*—then!"

The pistol flashed up and at the same instant the report rang through the house.

Laroque dropped his bag, and his right hand went up to his left side. She gazed at him fearfully and he stared back for a few moments with a look of blank amazement.

Then his eyes suddenly glazed and he pitched forward on his face at her feet, rolled over and was still.

There was a rush of footsteps up the stairs and down the hall and frightened voices calling back and forth. Then the door was thrown open and Victor, followed by a dozen guests and servants, dashed into the room.

Jacqueline was still standing with the warm pistol in her hand, looking down at the face of the dead man. She did not even lift her head when they entered. Victor took the pistol out of her limp fingers and called in a shaking voice:

"She's killed him! Run for the police, somebody. Quick!"

Jacqueline did not take her eyes off Laroque's still, white face.

"There's no hurry," she said, in dull, passionless tones. "I shan't try to get away!"

CHAPTER XVI

A WOMAN OF MYSTERY

It is a well-known fact that a sudden and powerful shock will have a remarkable counter-effect on a mind under the influence of alcohol and other stimulants. The shock is immediately succeeded by a numbness which in a few moments gives way to an astonishing clarity of thought.

Jacqueline went down the stairs of the Three Crowns and out into the street on the arm of a sergeant of police. She was in a trance, but before she had been taken a hundred steps from the door she had come to a full realization of her position. The officer who arrested her was a veteran, and knew full well that in the two or three minutes immediately after the commission of a great crime the criminal is more than likely to make startling admissions or give hints that lead to the discovery of the real motive. This does not, of course, apply to habitual criminals who

seldom utter a syllable until their defense is totally prepared and tested.

On the way down the stairs Sergeant Fontaine asked the woman, point-blank, why she had killed her companion. In the voice of a somnambulist she replied that she had done it to prevent him from committing an "abominable act that would bring grief and shame on someone she loved." And after that she could not be induced to open her mouth.

They were followed to the police station by a curious and excited throng of men and women, the latter reviling the prisoner and threatening her with the extremity of punishment while the sergeant had to stop several times and threaten to draw his saber to keep some of the men from laying violent hands on her.

"The law's delay," upon which the high priests of jurisprudence have opened the floodgates of their wrath, generally proves a blessing in criminal cases. For, by a singular contradiction of a natural law, the laws of a civilized community rise above their source—a majority of the individuals. The commune is less cruel than its component parts. Let an ultra-civilized, hyper-refined man stand between the slayer and his victim and watch the life blood's

fitful spurts from a wrecked artery, and all his veneer of refinement and civilization is burned up in a blast of horror and rage. He does not know —does not care to know—whether there was justification for the deed. In a breath he is hurled back thousands of years, and he demands the instant and primitive justice of his tribal forefathers.

Fortunately, it is not then that laws are either made or executed. Men who have grown gray and wise in the analysis of the human brute sit far removed from scenes of violence and frame the laws, and they are executed when natural passions have cooled.

Of this latter type of man was Henri Valmorin, the public prosecutor of Bordeaux. He was remarkably able and ambitious, but his ambition did not take the form of worldly advancement. He had a comfortable income beyond his salary and enough reserve to give his daughter a handsome *dot*, so he did not feel the need of a higher position for the sake of money.

His office as public prosecutor appealed to him and he filled it so ably that he would have been advanced a dozen times had it not been known that he preferred this work to any other. He had

a true and broad conception of his functions. His work was to protect the community and punish its enemies, but he never erred by falling into the habit of regarding every individual accused of a crime as a presumptive criminal. He was rather counsel for the defense until the police and examining magistrate placed in his hands the weapons of attack. Then he became the shrewd, skilful, uncompromising prosecutor.

M. Valmorin was in the office of his friend, M. Feverel, Examining Magistrate, when the woman of the Three Crowns was brought before him. He remained in the background and paid but little attention to the proceedings—for as much as a minute. Then his interest was keyed up to the highest pitch.

M. Feverel began with the usual questions as to name, age, place of birth, etc., which are to examiner and examined a mutual test of strength, as two pugilists dance around each other for the first round of a fight without striking a blow. To the surprise of both men the woman maintained an absolute and indifferent silence. There was nothing about her suggestive of sullen stubbornness. She looked over M. Feverel's head through an open window with an expression which indicated

that she had not even heard the questions. M. Valmorin studied her face closely. Through the ravages of vice and the mask of despair his experienced eyes could see the wreck of a departed beauty and refinement of features that must have been once remarkable. M. Feverel, though less experienced, perceived also that there was apparently some deep and tragic purpose back of the silence that he had at first attributed to the sullen brutishness of her class. But how to break it down?

"Madame," he said, courteously, dropping his brusque professional manner, "you must see that your present course cannot but be prejudicial to your case. The authorities will have no difficulty in ultimately establishing your identity but you can readily save us much inconvenience by replying to these simple questions—— Is your name Laroque? Was this man your husband?"

The woman gave no sign that she had heard. M. Feverel bit his lip. He had purposely used the most polished French and he was sure that she understood him. But he was apparently no nearer to making her speak.

"What did you mean by saying that you killed this man to prevent him from bringing grief and

shame on someone you love?" he demanded suddenly.

The lips moved almost imperceptibly, and for a fraction of a second the eyes wavered and met the magistrate's sharp gaze. But she did not make a sound and the next moment her face was as impassive as before.

M. Valmorin, narrowly watching her, waited for the magistrate's next move. The latter had, at command, a voice as soft and persuasive as a woman's and many an evildoer had felt its spell and had been lured to confession.

"Do not think, madame," he began, his tone at once, respectful, inclusive and inviting, "that I would try to draw you into saying anything that can injure your cause! Do not consider me an enemy. I know that you shot this man Laroque in the Hotel of the Three Crowns and I am more than willing to believe that you had some good reason for this terrible act. Your words to the policeman who arrested you are an indication of that. It is not my duty to try to convict you of crime which was probably justifiable. The man that you killed was an ex-convict and society is well-rid of him. You have probably simply saved the State the expense of putting him in prison once more and keep-

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *Madame X.*

MADAME X FALLS INTO THE CLUTCHES OF LAROQUE IN BUENOS AYRES.

ing him there. I am more than willing to believe that your reasons for killing him were excusable, even in the eyes of the law.

"Look upon me as a friend!" he continued persuasively. "In my office there is no criminal, no judge. You are simply accused of a homicide which you undoubtedly committed. But the law holds that many forms of homicide are justifiable. Convince me that you had even a fairly good reason for shooting this man—and I won't be hard to convince—and it is likely that you may never even come to trial—that your story may be buried with the few who must know it. My stenographer and my friend, the prosecutor, will leave us here together and you can explain everything to me and to me, alone."

Valmorin rose with a bow and passed slowly out followed by M. Feverel's stenographer. Jacqueline's eyes met his as the door closed and he began to speak again.

"Now we are alone!" and the tone was even more inviting and confidential. "You can talk to me now without fear. I do not care to pry into the secrets of your past. You need not mention any names. But just to tell me as simply as you can the reason you killed this prison rat!"

The voice put them on the same level—made them allies against the dead. In its soft, gentle rise and fall, in the dark sympathetic eyes and clean, aquiline face there was something approaching hypnotic power, as several ladies of Bordeaux knew. She began to feel a strange sensation of rest and comfort and vaguely wished that he would go on. M. Feverel's trained eye caught the all but imperceptible relaxation of the rigid figure. A thrill of triumph ran through him. He was winning! But there was no sign of elation or impatience in his voice or words when he continued.

He begged her not to think that the machinery of the law was directed against her. Justice was not blind. She was clear-sighted. She was not sternly even-handed, but more frequently merciful. She had long since forgotten the bitter law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. She could make allowances for the frailty of humanity. She could understand that there might be many circumstances under which an assassination might be justifiable. Nay, more—when it became a duty to kill!

Twice when he paused, Jacqueline's lips trembled and her eyes looked into his with yearning. She seemed about to speak, but her lips closed firmly

and her glance sought the window, without a word uttered.

Suddenly he rang a bell and a policeman appeared at the door.

"Remove the prisoner!" he commanded in a harsh, curt tone that fell on the woman like the blow of a whip. She hesitated and half-extended her hand as if to stop him and once more the magistrate thought that he had triumphed. But the impulse was conquered and she passed out of his office without having uttered a word.

M. Valmorin returned and in reply to his questioning look, the magistrate shook his head.

"She would not speak," he said, wearily. M. Valmorin's interest as an expert was aroused, and with the magistrate he went over the examination in detail. M. Feverel told him the impression that he had made once or twice and expressed the fear that she would never be forced to tell her story.

"You can see, my friend," he said, "that she is addicted to the use of drugs. She has now been without anything of the sort for forty-eight hours. That means that her nerves must be in a bad shape, and it also means that she has an iron will to conceal the fact so determinedly and foil the examination."

M. Feverel's prophecy proved true.

In the first few hours of her arrest Jacqueline's instinct told her she would be helpless in a verbal duel with these trained men of the law. An apparently aimless question and a careless answer might be the combination to open the locked gates of her past and then she would have killed Laroque in vain. So, as the days passed and the examinations followed each other with nerve-wracking persistency, she wept, shrieked, and groaned for hours in her cell, begging for ether or morphine, but not a word of her story could be forced from her.

She refused counsel and when the court appointed an advocate she would not see him. At last, M. Feverel abandoned hope.

"You will have to try the case as a plain homicide," he told M. Valmorin. "The testimony of the servants and the policeman is ample for conviction but—what is back of it all?"

"And you could not even find out her name!" mused the prosecutor.

"Call her Madame X!" snapped the exasperated magistrate. "She is about as thoroughly and stubbornly mysterious and elusive as any quantity in the algebra of my youth!"

M. Valmorin laughed a little and told the story

in the courts that day. The mysterious woman had already attracted some attention among the journalists who frequent the halls of justice, and when brilliant M. Feverel called her "Madame X," as an acknowledgement of defeat, her case in the three days became a *cause celebre* in Bordeaux. In the cafés, in the courts, in the homes, nothing else was talked about for weeks. In spite of the elaborate passport system and registry, here was a woman who absolutely defied the authorities to find a clue to her identity. The police of Buenos Ayres could not help them, and beyond that city her past was a blank. Who was she? Where had she come from? Why had she killed her companion? Was he her husband? These and a hundred other questions were asked every hour of the day. Scores of rumors were set afloat. She was the daughter of a noble house who had run away from a convent. She was the wife of a marquis, had left him and married an adventurer. She was the queen of a band of kidnappers. She was the leader of a secret society of murder.

She had served a sentence for counterfeiting in an American penitentiary. She was a nihilist, escaped from Siberia. And so on.

Dozens were turned away from the prison gate

every day. Morbid women and curious men pleaded with the police for a chance to look at her, assuring the chief that they would be able to identify her. A number of hysterical women started a fund for her defense, but this was firmly suppressed.

Advocates of established reputation, who had smilingly congratulated Maitre Raymond Floriot on his first brief and expressed the hope that it would lead to something worth while, now regretted that they had not been appointed by the court to defend her, though it was an unprofitable and hopeless case.

But M. Valmorin was unaffectedly pleased. He was glad that young Floriot had stumbled into a position to attract so much attention, and was almost sorry that the young man had no chance to win his case. The reason is not far to seek. For several years M. Valmorin and M. Floriot, père, had seen that M. Raymond was in love with blue-eyed, sweet-faced Helene Valmorin. There was nothing remarkable about this, as numbers of young men in Bordeaux were in precisely the same state of mind. But what was important was that it was equally plain that Mademoiselle Helene was passionately in love with the dark-eyed,

curly-haired young advocate. The fathers knew that it was only a question of a very short time when they would be formally requested to sanction the marriage. Hence M. Valmorin's desire to see his prospective son-in-law rise as rapidly as possible.

That the young man would rise, he was certain. He had inherited, as has been mentioned, his father's faultlessly logical mind and love of his profession and his mother's quickly sympathetic and emotional temperament. His mind was quick to grasp a situation or an unexpected point and equally quick to give it its true value. Coupled with these gifts he had a marked facility of expression and a smooth, vibrant voice. As Mademoiselle Helene said, he made love beautifully.

M. Valmorin was prepared to do what he could financially, and he knew that Raymond's father would strain himself to establish the young people properly, but the young man must look to success in his profession to raise a family.

M. Floriot had written that he would come over from Toulouse to watch his son handle his first case, and M. Valmorin planned to talk things over with him then.

It was to be a great day for Raymond and all who

were dear to him had promised to be in court when he appeared for the first time on the firing-line. Rose had promised to take charge of Helene. His father, by request of the President of the Court of Bordeaux, would sit on the bench with the judges. "Uncle" Noel and Dr. Chennel were coming from Paris.

The young man worked hard all day on his case and told Helene about it in the evening, and then worked far into the night. He read parts of his speech to her, while her father pretended to be eavesdropping in the hall "to learn the secrets of the defense." He did not have any false notions about the strength of his battle-line. He knew that he had a bad case but he was determined to do as well as could be done. As he remarked, "it is hard work defending a homicide whose conduct is the best evidence for the prosecution."

As the day approached he was nervous, anxious, restless—but ready.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO LOVERS AND A LECTURE

It was a day of excitement in the house of Floriot the morning before the trial. M. Floriot arrived from Toulouse on the preceding evening and M. Valmorin planned to call on him that morning if he could find time. Helene was at the house before ten o'clock eager to see Raymond. He had gone to the prison early to make a last attempt to see his client, and she put in the time of waiting by chatting with Rose and lamenting the fact that Raymond's father could not be the judge in the case so he would have a reasonably certain chance of winning!

"It's hard enough to get cases, isn't it?" she complained.

"I don't know anything about it," replied Rose cheerfully, "but I guess the law is like anything else—you have to make a beginning!"

"And Raymond is beginning to-morrow!" mur-

mured the girl, as if it had just occurred to her. "To-morrow he is pleading his first case!"

"And a capital case to begin with it is!" declared Rose. "Everyone is talking about it!"

"Oh, I hope he'll win!" exclaimed the girl, almost tearfully. "I haven't thought of anything else for weeks!"

"Oh, I'm not anxious about that!" returned Rose, with the confidence of an old and loyal servant. "M. Raymond is clever, I tell you! He'll convince them!"

"Do you think he'll be back soon?" asked Helene, anxiously.

"That depends!" smiled Rose. "Does he know you're here?"

"I—I don't think so—— No!" Helene replied, turning hastily to the window of the study where they were talking. "I only told him that my father would probably call on M. Floriot this morning at eleven o'clock, and that I might come and meet him. Rose, what are you laughing at?"

"Oh, nothing in particular."

"Don't tease me!" she pleaded.

"Well, I was laughing," chuckled the housekeeper, "because you came here in such a hurry

at half-past nine to meet your father, who won't be here until eleven!"

Helene blushed.

"I suppose you think I'm an awfully silly girl?"

"Oh, dear, no!" Rose assured her with a grave little smile. "I'm only too glad to see that you and Raymond love each other."

The girl's face lit up with a quick little gleam of pleasure.

"Really, does that please you?" she asked softly.

"Very much!" nodded Rose. And the next moment the girl kissed her withered cheek.

"I brought the young man up, you know," she continued, slipping her arm affectionately around Helene's waist. "And I feel as if he belonged to me a little. I am very happy that he has made such a good choice."

"He is going to talk to his father about it this morning," said the girl, timidly. Rose smiled.

"I don't think he'll surprise him much."

Helene gave her a startled look.

"You don't think M. Floriot suspects?" she gasped.

"That you and Raymond are in love with each

other? Oh, of course, not!" laughed Rose. "He would have to be blind not to see it. Everyone in the neighborhood knows it!"

With a gasp of consternation the girl hid her face in her hands.

"The baker asked me yesterday when the wedding was to be celebrated," went on the housekeeper, wickedly. "And day before yesterday it was the butcher. A few days ago the grocer made some inquiries about it, and——"

She was apparently prepared to continue indefinitely when a joyous voice from the doorway interrupted her.

"There you are!"

And Maitre Raymond Floriot hurried in.

"Yes, there she is—quite by accident! You didn't expect to see her, did you?" They heard her laughing as she went down the hall.

Helene managed to recover a semblance of her prim dignity as she gave him both her hands and looked up into his dancing eyes.

"You did not expect to see me this early, did you?" she asked.

"No, I didn't expect you in the least!" he laughed. "I shouldn't wonder if that was why I came so early myself!"

"But seriously, aren't you surprised to find me here?"

He bent over and kissed her lightly on the lips.

"No, I'm not surprised," he replied, gravely. "I like to think that you are as impatient as I am —and it seems weeks since I saw you!"

"Twelve hours!" she laughed happily.

"Twelve years!"

"Have you thought of me since then?"

He answered that question in a manner that the custom of some thousands of years has proved to be the best.

"Did you dream of me?"

"Not at all!" he shook his head and smiled. She moved away in mock offense.

"Reality is too sweet a dream, dearest, for us to need dreams!" he added, tenderly. This little speech was followed by a silence of several minutes, in which occurred the performance considered proper under the circumstances.

Helene drew gently away.

"Have you been working hard?" she asked.

"Yes, I was up at five o'clock this morning finishing my brief. I'm quite ready now."

"And the case comes off to-morrow!" she exclaimed, softly.

"To-morrow is the great day!" nodded Raymond.

"And I'm to hear you!"

"Of course! But I'll have to find a place where I can't see you. I'd forget what I was talking about if I caught sight of you; and just think what it would mean if I should stutter and stammer and break down with you in court! Why, I'd never get over it!" He shivered with a dread that was not all feigned.

"And you've made up your mind to speak to your father to-day?" she asked timidly, after a little pause.

"Yes, I'm going to speak to him as soon as he comes in," declared her lover with an air of hardihood that was far from real.

"Well, you must be careful not to stutter and stammer and break down then!" she smiled. Rose put her head in the door an instant.

"M. the President is here!" she whispered and was gone.

"Now, then, shoulder arms!" ordered Helene, in an eager undertone as they heard the step of the father in the hall outside. She was bubbling with inward laughter as her panic-stricken lover hastily fell back out of the direct line of vision

from the door. So when M. Floriot walked up and kissed her he did not at first see that his son was present.

"Good morning, my child!" he said with a tender smile.

Raymond edged forward and cleared his throat. "You might say, 'good morning, my children,' father," he suggested in an uncertain voice.

"If you like!" was the smiling reply. And taking a hand of each he said: "Good morning, my two dear children!"

Helene ran over to his desk and returned with an enormous bunch of roses in a slender vase.

"I brought you these this morning, monsieur," she said, looking up at him shyly.

M. the President took them with both hands and buried his face in their fragrance.

"They are only less charming than the donor!" he declared with a stately bow.

"Oh, M. Floriot!" she protested with a blush and smile. Then as he turned to replace the bouquet on his desk she added in a whisper to Raymond:

"I think you might speak to him now."

"So do I!" he agreed in the same tone.

"My father told me to tell you that he would be

over to see you about eleven o'clock, M. Floriot," she remarked as he turned to them again.

"I shall be charmed to see him!"

"I'll go and bring him—if you don't mind!" she offered eagerly. M. the President smiled.

"I'll try not to be very angry!" he assured her. The three walked slowly out into the garden where the older man found a seat in a little rustic house while the lovers moved slowly toward the gate. He pretended to be much absorbed in the morning paper, but watched them slyly out of the corner of his eye. Instead of going outside, Helene stopped behind a big shrub that totally concealed her, and Raymond came back with not exactly eager strides.

Within ten feet of the seated figure in the rustic house he stopped and twice opened his mouth, but could not get out a word. His father did not seem to have the slightest idea that he was there. He took another timid step; and then, as the paper rustled, he bolted in the direction of the bush that concealed his ally.

Helene stepped out, shaking with silent laughter, and waved him back with imperious gestures. He returned once more to the attack, but again gave way to panic at the critical moment. At

last he edged up to within conversational ear-shot and asked with a mock solemnity that did not conceal his nervousness:

"Is M. the President extremely busy?"

"Extremely!" replied his father, without looking up from the paper. Raymond winced slightly; and, then raising his eyes to the sky, murmured dolefully:

"What a beastly nuisance!"

M. the President glanced up in surprise.

"Did you want to speak to me?" he inquired, politely.

"Yes—and quite seriously!"

His father rose with a laugh and folded his paper.

"For how long?" he demanded, with a mischievous smile.

"Not very long!" Raymond hastily assured him. "At least, I don't think it will take long to say it."

"Try it in four words!"

"I love Helene Valmorin!" he blurted out, desperately.

M. the President fell back a step, his face expressing the utmost astonishment, but his eyes were laughing.

"Do you!" he exclaimed. Raymond gazed at him doubtfully a moment and then saw it all.

"Did—did you know it?" he asked, sheepishly. His father burst into a hearty laugh.

"What an old fool you must hink I am!"

The lover's instinct told Raymond to strike quickly.

"And I want to marry her," he went on. M. the President nodded.

"I can quite understand that," he smiled. "Well, God bless you both and make you happy! Is that all you want to say?"

"Yes, that's all!" breathed his son, with a deep sigh of relief. M. Floriot gazed into the eyes that were so like the lost woman's, and all the love and yearning that he had ever felt for mother and son shone in his own. He stepped up to the boy and laid a hand affectionately on his shoulder. Raymond felt the grip of the fingers as his father began to speak.

"My boy," he said, in grave, gentle tones, "you're a good fellow, and you've been the one joy of my life. I think Helene is worthy of you. Love her, my lad! And love her always—whatever happens! Be her friend, her guide, her mainstay—as well as her husband.

"Above all—do your best to understand her! Women are not always easy to understand; but don't leave your wife out of your own life!

"Share everyone of your joys and everyone of your sorrows with her. You will have hours of gloomy thought and bitterness, perhaps—most men do. But never forget in those unhappy hours that a husband has a heavy responsibility. Always remember, Raymond, my boy, that you are responsible for the life and soul and happiness of the woman who gives herself to you!"

The young man listened gravely with bowed head. As his father paused he looked up with a tender smile.

"I don't think the responsibility will be a very heavy one in my case, father," he said.

"Life sometimes proves to be exceedingly cruel, my boy," replied his father, shaking his head.

"Valmorin will be here presently and I will have a talk with him. I must tell him a secret before I ask him to give you his daughter's hand."

"A secret!" exclaimed the young man, startled.

"Yes," nodded his father. "I'll tell you what it is afterwards." Raymond felt a grow-

ing uneasiness and dread. Lovers are easily alarmed.

"Your secret—won't—won't prevent him——?" he stammered.

"No!" replied his father with a light laugh. "I don't think so."

CHAPTER XVIII

A GHOST RISES

For a time the two were silent in that close communion which is possible only to father and son, who are all in all to each other. Then the father's face lit up with a whimsical smile.

"Mind you, I don't expect that Helene will be very rich," he said. Raymond laughed.

"I don't either!" he replied.

"You have the 125,000 francs of your mother's fortune and I will add as much as I can myself."

"Oh, we'll get along all right," his son assured him with a smile. "You seem to forget my briefs."

"Impossible!" laughed his father. "You haven't any."

"I have one that isn't bringing in anything in the way of money but it is giving me advertisement that will lead to profitable cases."

M. the President, being of the old school of law-

yers, shook his head at this value set on publicity; but he made no comment.

"Are you ready for to-morrow?" he asked. Raymond nodded.

"I saw the presiding judge this morning and he was full of praise for you," went on his father with a fond gleam in his eyes. "They are going to make a place for me to-morrow."

"So you told me. But you'll make me terribly nervous!" protested Raymond.

"Not a bit of it! Have you really an interesting case?"

"Well, yes and no," replied the young advocate. "A wretched woman who has killed her lover for no reason that anyone can find out—and she won't speak. For the last three months she has not uttered a word in the prison that can be of any interest to anybody. We don't know who she is, where she comes from or what her name is. I haven't even seen her or heard the sound of her voice; and when the names of the judges, the public prosecutor and her defending lawyer were sent in to her, she tore up the paper without looking at it."

"And couldn't the Examining Magistrate get anything out of her?"

"Nothing! He dubbed her Madame X," added Raymond with a smile.

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Oh, like all women of her kind. She is, I understand, addicted to the use of drugs, and her supply being cut off she naturally turns from stupidity to hysteria all the time. I'm afraid it's one of the cases that are worked out before they come to trial. I don't see how the court proceedings can last much longer than five minutes. But I'll do my best."

"Try pathos," suggested his father. "Try to work on the sympathies of the judge and jury."

"That's what I'm going to do," smiled Raymond. "I've been practising tears in my voice for the last three days, but I'm not going to have an easy time of it. It's rather hard to find excuses for a woman when you don't know why the crime was committed." And he shook his head dubiously.

"On the contrary, that gives you every chance," declared his father. "See here! Your client won't speak and so she can't contradict. This gives you a fine opportunity to invent a host of reasons. Make the jury respect her silence! Throw a veil of mystery over the whole crime

and give your imagination play. Say that she is the victim of heredity—say anything you can think of that will work on the jury's feelings and you have a good chance to win."

Raymond listened with eager attention.

"I had something of that in mind," he said, "but I'll work it up stronger than I intended. I didn't——"

He was interrupted by a cheery shout from the house-door and both turned quickly to see M. Noel hurrying across the garden. The elder men greeted each other with hearty affection.

"And how is the young disciple of St. Yves?" asked Noel.

"St. Yves?" questioned Raymond with a puzzled smile as he shook hands.

"Why, certainly! St. Yves of Brittany! Don't you know——? How does the Latin go, Louis?"

M. the President threw up his hands and laughed.

"Let me see! 'Advocatus sed non latro—latro'—I can't remember it. Anyway, it fits your case, Maitre Raymond. He was an advocate but not a thief, and devoted his life to the service of the poor. So he is supposed to be the patron saint of the lawyers—though more of them to-day are

rather inclined to lay votive offerings on the shrine of Mammon. So to-morrow is the great day, eh?"

"Yes, to-morrow is the day."

"Feel frightened?"

"A little excited," the young man admitted. "Have you really come all the way from Paris to be here to-morrow?"

"Of course I have!" The lined face softened. "I'd have come from Kamschatka to see you fight your first battle!"

"Chennel is coming, too," remarked Floriot.

"Good! You were not particularly blooming the day I met the worthy doctor, young man," said Noel, turning to Raymond.

"No, so I've been told," smiled Raymond; "Dr. Chennel is going to take a practice at Biarritz. He often comes here to see me. Now, I think I'll go over my brief again, father, and see if I can't work in some of the things you suggested."

"Yes, that's it! Shake them up, my lad!" nodded his father. "After all she may be more sinned against than sinning—or you can make them think so, anyway. Well, what do you think of the boy?" he demanded, as Raymond disap-

peared in the direction of the large bush near the gate.

"You ought to be proud of him."

"I am! Very proud!" said Floriot, softly. There was a long pause. Floriot motioned his friend to a seat on the bench in the rustic house and sat beside him. He felt the need of comfort and counsel; for the hour that he had dreaded for years was upon him at last. He must tell Raymond the truth about his mother.

Twenty years of tireless searching had, indeed, proved utterly vain. There was every reason to believe that Jacqueline was dead and that the true story of the boy's mother might be buried with the three men and one woman who knew it. But this loophole of escape from the ordeal did not even present itself to a man with Floriot's stern sense of honor.

How would he take it? Floriot had no idea of defending himself or trying to distort the facts in the least degree. If anything, he would take more than his share of the blame for the wreck of his home. It would be terrible enough to tell Raymond that his mother had fallen, but what would he say when he was told that she had repented and pressed her forehead against her

husband's shoes only to be hurled out, friendless, on the world—condemned to death, or worse than death?

Would the boy—at last knowing why he had grown up without a mother's love, and all the million priceless and nameless joys the phrase contains—rise in the wrath of his outraged youth and denounce the father who had robbed him? What would he say to the neglect that had driven his mother to shame and placed the brand on his own pure life? And now, whatever the cost, he must tell him. . . .

In the twenty years they had pursued a common quest, these long silences were not unusual when the two friends met. Noel divined a little—but only a very little—of what was passing in the other's mind. He had not foreseen this crisis.

"I never look at him without thinking of his mother!" he said, softly. "Louis, it's awful to think that in all these years we have never been able to find a trace."

Floriot's only reply was a somber shake of the head.

"God knows we've hunted!"

"I've done all I can—we've done all we can!" returned the husband in bitter hopelessness. "De-

tectives, advertising—everything! I haven't told you that I went to Monte Carlo a few days ago to see a woman that seemed to answer the description. The usual result!" And he gazed out across the garden.

"And last week I thought I had come to the end of the hunt," returned Noel. "The first night that I reached Paris I dropped into a music hall and thought that I recognized her on the stage. I got an introduction to the woman. She had Jacqueline's eyes to a line almost, but that was all. I was sure from the front of the house! You remember those eyes?"

"If I could only forget them!" groaned the other, burying his face in his hands. There was a long silence. In the last few years growing despair and the inaction that is the inevitable outgrowth of the conviction of failure had succeeded the constantly reviving hope that had fed the energy of the search. Their talks, recently, had been bitter reminiscences instead of optimistic plans. At last Floriot raised his head and spoke in a low voice.

"I think sometimes that she must be dead or we should have found her!" he said. Noel, staring at the ground between his feet, did not answer at once; then:

"Perhaps!" he said in the same low tone. "And perhaps that is the best thing that could have happened!"

The other understood his meaning and shuddered. There was another pause and then Floriot spoke of the matter that lay heaviest on his mind.

"I have never—dared yet—to tell Raymond—the truth about his mother," he said, unsteadily; "but I have to now!"

Noel stared at his friend in amazement.

"Tell Raymond!" he exclaimed, "Why?"

"He wants to marry and—and—I must tell him the truth!"

There was a smothered exclamation from Noel as he grasped the situation. He was silent a few moments and then he asked with meaning emphasis:

"Will you tell him the *whole* truth?"

Floriot straightened up with a determined expression.

"Yes!" he declared, "I am going to tell him everything! He must know the whole unvarnished truth and—God knows what he'll think of me!"

Noel confusedly murmured something meant to be reassuring but Floriot interrupted.

"Oh, I have no illusions!" he cried bitterly. "Youth doesn't make allowances! It is possible that he may love me a little after he has heard all of it but he will never forgive me for having robbed him of his mother!"

Noel pulled himself together and replied with a heartiness that he did not feel.

"Why, of course, he will!" he declared. "He knows what kind of a man you are—what a father you have been to him—and he will not need to be told how you have suffered and repented."

The other shook his head hopelessly.

"The boy is in love!" he groaned. "If it were not for that there might be some hope. But, don't you see?—He is madly in love with a pure, beautiful girl. He will try to put himself in my place and fail! He will try to imagine himself throwing Helene out into the street in the rain after she has grovelled at his feet—and he will think I am a monster!"

Before Noel could think of a counter-argument Rose hurried out from the house with a visiting card in her hand. Composing himself, Floriot looked up and asked:

"What is it, Rose?"

She handed him the card with:

"It's the two gentlemen who were here before and wanted to see you, M. the President."

"Perissard! Perissard!" mused the President, studying the bit of pasteboard. "I don't know the name. However, Rose, show them in and take M. Noel up to his room."

The friends silently gripped hands as a mute promise that they would renew the conversation later and Noel went in with the housekeeper.

CHAPTER XIX

HOPE AT LAST

Messrs. Perissard and Merivel were not hopelessly shocked and grief-stricken over the death of Laroque. They were grateful to his memory, inasmuch as he had put them in the way of making 125,000 francs with more ease and less risk than they had expected to incur in collecting, at the outside, three-fifths of that amount in Bordeaux. They were doubly grateful when they reflected that his timely death had saved them ten per cent of that amount.

While he would have been useful in the matter of the public official of Bordeaux, they felt that they would eventually find as trustworthy an agent. On the whole, from the viewpoint of the partners in Confidential Missions, nothing in his life became him as the leaving it. The fact that he had been murdered by the wife of the President of the Court of Toulouse put that gentleman in position where he could not possibly refuse to pay for "discretion."

They went over all this as they sat in a café not far from the Floriot house in Bordeaux and waited for M. Floriot's return. It had taken them nearly three months to finally fix upon him as the husband of the homicide of the Three Crowns. They went to Toulouse to interview him and found that he had just gone to Bordeaux to attend the trial in which his son was to appear for the defense. They fairly hugged themselves with pious joy when they saw the shocking corruption of the whole proceedings.

"We have got him, my dear Merivel," declared M. Perissard. "And he has actually come to Bordeaux to see the trial!"

"A most shrewd man!" rumbled his colleague.

"I should say so!" returned M. Perissard. "He has his own son chosen for the defense, and according to gossip, his son is to marry the daughter of the Public Prosecutor!"

"A *most* clever man!" insisted M. Merivel in a voice like the roar of the surf.

"And they tell me that Floriot's wife refused to say a word to the Examining Magistrate."

"Of course! The husband has been telling her what to do!"

"Obviously! Obviously!" agreed the senior part-

ner with a vigorous nod. "In this way, you see, her name won't even be mentioned, and as nobody knows her in Bordeaux——" A two-handed gesture and a shrug of the shoulders filled the hiatus.

"None of the trouble will get out of the family," concluded M. Merivel heavily.

"The jury will find her guilty or acquit her—that is of no interest whatever. But no one will ever know the inner interest!"

"Excepting ourselves, my dear Perissard," corrected the ex-schoolmaster.

"Exactly! Exactly! It is *most* providential!"

It was with the situation thus reasoned out that the defenders of society presented themselves for the second time at the house of M. Floriot, when they were conducted to the garden. M. the President received them with grave courtesy and invited them to take seats. With all three comfortably settled, M. Merivel being a little in the background, he asked:

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Have I the honor of speaking to President Floriot?" inquired M. Perissard in his most polished manner.

"Yes, monsieur. And your name is——?"

"Perissard! This is M. Merivel, my associate," he added, rising with a bow to that gentleman who also rose and saluted M. the President with a profound obeisance.

"And what business brings you to Bordeaux?" M. Floriot inquired once more when they had all resumed their seats.

"A—a matter of some delicacy, M. the President," began the senior partner, clearing his throat impressively. "A matter which interests you personally."

M. Floriot raised his eyebrows a trifle.

"Well?"

M. Perissard fidgeted slightly. When he spoke again it was in his most "inspiring" manner.

"Every man has, at one time or another in his life, reason to regret the past, and these regrets—however secretly we may hide them—remain open wounds," he began, heavily.

"Alas!" exclaimed M. Merivel in gloomy thunder. M. Floriot stirred impatiently.

"Probably true. But kindly explain yourself!" he commanded, shortly.

M. Perissard at once decided that nothing was to be gained by moralizing, so he went directly to business.

"M. the President, you were Deputy Attorney in Paris twenty years ago, were you not?"

"Yes."

"And if I am correctly informed you married a lady named Jacqueline Lefevre, at the Town Hall in the Rue Drouot. She brought you a dot of 125,000 francs."

Floriot's glance was troubled and uneasy.

"Your information is perfectly correct," he said. "But why all these questions?"

"Because they are indispensable," M. Perissard assured him, and he was backed up by a ponderous nod from his colleague. "In family matters of this kind one cannot take too many precautions. In matters of honor, I have always said——"

Floriot half-rose. His face had paled slightly and his manner was nervous.

"My time is limited!" he broke in, abruptly.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur! I beg your pardon!"

And four fat hands motioned him back to his seat.

"I will be brief!" M. Perissard assured him. "Your marriage was not altogether as happy as it might have been, and one day you had a violent scene. You turned out of your house the lady who had the honor of bearing your name!"

"How do you know this? Who told you?" demanded Floriot. His voice was low and menacing.

"Ah, it is true, then!" exclaimed M. Perissard. The other gave no sign and Perissard took the silence as an assent.

"Very good! After this incident," he continued, hastily. "Madame Floriot traveled. She traveled very far and was more or less—happy. More or less!"

Floriot sprang up, white-faced and trembling.

"She is dead!" he cried. "You have come to tell me she is dead!"

M. Perissard smiled cunningly. He could appreciate good acting.

"Oh, no, I haven't!" he replied.

"She is *alive?*"

"Undoubtedly!"

"*Most* certainly!" thundered M. Merivel.

"And where is she? In Paris! In France! Where?" cried Floriot, almost too excited for coherency.

M. Perissard was beginning to be really puzzled. Was it possible that this man did not know who the woman of the Three Crowns was? Was it possible that he had not arranged the whole defense?

"Do you really mean that you don't know where your wife is now?" he demanded.

"No! No! But you've come to tell me, haven't you?" He was feverishly eager. He walked up and down before them with quick nervous strides and looked from one to the other with burning eyes.

"This is really most extraordinary!" declared M. Perissard. "I should have thought with all your means of getting information——"

"I have never heard from her or of her since the day she disappeared!"

"Never?" insisted the other, wonderingly.

"Never! I thought she was dead!"

"Extraordinary! Isn't it?" M. Perissard appealed to his partner.

"*Most* extraordinary!" was the prompt response.

Floriot was fairly dancing with excitement and impatience.

"You know where she is and where I can see her?" he demanded.

' Indeed, I do!" declared M. Perissard.

"Tell me, man! Tell me!" he cried.

M. Perissard stroked his chin a moment. All this excitement indicated excellent opportunities for financial advancement and he did not want to spoil anything through unwary haste.

"I have not been instructed to tell you," he said, guardedly.

"Good God, man! You don't mean to say you refuse?"

"My—my client has so instructed me——" began M. Perissard in his most professional tone.

"You come from her?" interrupted the other. "She's your client? What does she want? What can I do?"

M. Perissard drew a quick breath.

"She wants the money she brought with her on her marriage!" he plumped out.

"Her dot? Her 125,000 francs?"

"She wants that sum refunded to her!" affirmed M. Perissard, pursing up his lips impressively.

"She would have had it long ago if I had known where to find her!" cried Floriot.

"Then you will raise no objections?" There was a triumphant gleam in M. Perissard's pig-like eyes.

"None whatever! The money is here!"

The two partners rose as one and held out their hands.

"I will tell her what you say—word for word!" declared the senior.

"Give me her address so I can go and see her at once!" pleaded Floriot, eagerly.

"M. the President," replied M. Perissard in his heaviest manner. "I must beg you to excuse me! I have no authority from my client to give you her address."

"But——"

"I am only acting on instructions!"

"But what reason can she have for refusing to see me?" he protested, wildly.

"I don't know that she has any reason, but before giving you her address I must ask her permission!" was the firm response.

"Then you are going to see her?"

"I shall write to her," replied M. Perissard. "I may confide one thing in you, I think, without exceeding my professional duty."

"Yes?" questioned Floriot eagerly.

"May I count on your discretion?"

"Absolutely! You have my word for it!"

M. Perissard appeared to hesitate.

"Madame Floriot is just now in—ah—er—tight place," he said.

"A very tight place!" echoed his partner.

"She is absolutely penniless!"

"Great heavens!" gasped Floriot, horror-strick-

en. He dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"Are—are you willing to send her some money?" inquired the senior partner. Floriot sprang up, his face flushed.

"By all means!" he cried, his hand darting into his coat pocket. "Will you see that she gets it? *Immediately?*"

"Without a moment's delay!" M. Perissard assured him, heartily. Floriot bowed his head as he worked with the leather tongue of his pocket-book, and when he looked up his eyes were misty with tears.

"Gentlemen," he said, brokenly, "you must excuse my emotion—when I think that—she—is without a penny——! Here are 300 francs—all I have with me. Send it to her at once and——"

"She shall receive the money to-day!" M. Perissard broke in. "Allow me to give you a receipt. And when can I see you again, M. the President? Will the day after to-morrow suit you?"

"Can you have an answer by then?"

"I hope so!"

"I'll expect you in the morning then." He smiled almost joyously and held out his hands to the visitors. "We can go and see her together! I

need not ask you to be discreet, need I? Nobody must know!" he added anxiously. M. Perissard drew himself up haughtily.

"M. the President!" he said stiffly, "I have not the honor of being known to you, but remember these words: Whatever may happen, we are engaged by our word of honor to remain silent—my partner, you and I!"

"Silent as the tomb!" echoed M. Merivel.

"And you may always reckon—always, I repeat—on our entire discretion!"

Floriot put out a hand which was eagerly gripped.

"Gentlemen, I thank you!" he said in a grave, unsteady voice. And with many a scrape and hand-shake and assurance of their perfect discretion the firm of Perissard and Merivel bowed itself out.

For a moment, after they had gone, Floriot stood with head raised and fists clenched.

"Oh, Jacqueline! Jacqueline!" he murmured aloud, as if he felt that the cry from his heart must reach her ears. "Forgive—forgive me!"

Then he darted across the garden and into the house like a boy. Up the steps he raced, three at a time, and burst into Noel's room with tears

streaming down his face, speechless with emotion. Noel started up from the suit-case he was unpacking and stared at his friend in alarm.

"For God's sake, Louis!" he cried. "What's the matter?"

"Jacqueline—Jacqueline is alive!"

In a bound Noel was across the room, with a grip on his friend's shoulder.

"What do you mean?" he cried, shaking him fiercely. "Alive! Who told you?"

In broken, gasping phrases Floriot told the story; and as Noel finally grasped the details, he clutched his friend's arms, and with a shout of joy hurled him on to the bed. Floriot bounded back to his feet and swung his fist into the other's back. Then these two gray-haired men threw each other around the room, rolled over together on the bed, knocked chairs over and tables upside down, shouting and laughing at the top of their lungs.

"Day after to-morrow! Twenty years, old man! I knew we'd win out at last!"

The uproar reached Raymond in his studio at the other end of the house and he ran up to see what was the matter. As he threw open the door of the disordered room he saw his father and M.

Noel shaking hands as enthusiastically as if they had not met for years.

"Why, father, what's the matter?" he cried.

Floriot ran over and threw an arm across his son's shoulders.

"Raymond, my boy!" he shouted, "A wonderful —an unbelievable happiness has come to your father! I can't tell you anything yet but, my God! I'm happy!"

CHAPTER XX

THE TRIAL BEGINS

Although he had been up most of the night at work on his speech, Maitre Raymond Floriot was among the early arrivals at court the next morning. His unlined, youthful face wore an expression of grave responsibility as incongruous as his black advocate's gown when he took his seat at his desk.

The more he had hammered at his appeal to the jury the more he realized that in the strength of his speech lay his one hope of victory. All the evidence would be against him. He did not expect to profit much by cross-examination. The affair was too simple. He must move the jury to pity. There was not even a chance to instil a doubt into the minds of the men who would judge his case. That is usually the chief aim of a defending lawyer in a bad murder trial. He does not have to convince twelve men of conscience that his client is innocent. If he can work one drop of the poison of uncertainty into their minds he is usually safe.

For the man of average imagination would rather violate his duty to the state a dozen times and let a dozen murderers go free than send one to the gallows and risk the punishment of remorse. "Certainty beyond reasonable doubt," which is the formula of the law, is a farce with most jurors. If there exists, to them, any doubt at all, nothing can convince them that that doubt is unreasonable.

With this powerful weapon taken from him, the young advocate had but one left—an appeal to the emotions. Had he had to face a jury of cold, law-worshipping Anglo-Saxons or stolid, virtue-loving Teutons his best move would have been a plea of guilty and an invocation to Mercy. On these a lawyer might wear out an oratorical rod of Moses without producing a drop of moisture in the way of a tear. But here were volatile, easily moved Latins, and Louis Floriot knew his people when he told his son to "shake them up." So the young man decided to ignore the evidence and build his whole speech on the statement that the woman made to the sergeant of gendarmes on her way to the prison after the shooting—that she had killed Laroque to prevent him from "doing an abominable act."

He was very nervous when he took his seat at

the table reserved for counsel for the defense, just in front of the dock. He felt himself growing more uneasy when the judges in their robes of red and black marched in from their room at the rear and the clerk solemnly proclaimed that court was in session.

The great hall was crowded to the doors with men and women from every plane of the social scale. Dozens of lawyers came to watch their new brother break his first spear. A number of seats were reserved for municipal officers. Veiled society women sat among them. Banker, butcher and baker rubbed elbows and craned necks in the general throng, and women of all descriptions squeezed and jostled their way through them.

Raymond ran his eye hurriedly over the first rows and caught a smile of pride on Helene's lovely face, gazing at him over the railing that cut off the spectators from the attorneys and court officials. M. Noel and Dr. Chennel gave him reassuring nods as they met his glance and Rose waved her hand. He turned hastily away and began busying himself with his papers as the prisoner was led in between two gendarmes. She was crying and held her handkerchief to her eyes as she took her seat in the dock. Raymond watched her ner-

vously and tried to say a few encouraging words but he could only stammer. M. Valmorin, from his desk on the opposite side of the "bank," smiled at his future son-in-law's symptoms of panic and gave him a friendly nod.

Raymond had watched court proceedings in criminal cases so often that he was as familiar with the routine as a practised lawyer but now that he was for the first time an actor it all seemed strange and overwhelming. He was conscious only that Helene and his father never took their eyes off him but he never looked their way again. The voice of the clerk reading the charge sounded far away and seemed to be no part of the present scene.

"—In consequence of which the woman, Laraque, is accused of having, on April 3rd, 19—, at half-past five in the afternoon, committed an act of voluntary homicide in Room 24 of the Hotel of the Three Crowns in Bordeaux, on the person of her lover, Frederick Laroque, a crime punishable by Articles 295 and 304 of the Penal Code."

The voice stopped amid absolute silence, and then Raymond heard the grave, gentle tones of the kindly old President of the Court.

"Woman Laroque, you have heard the charge

against you. You are accused of having committed an act of voluntary homicide on the person of your lover, Frederick Laroque. What have you to say in your defense? Do you admit that you are guilty of this crime?"

He paused and Raymond, turning in his chair, looked up at his client. Every eye in the room was on her. She was dressed entirely in black and wore a black cloth shawl over her head that almost entirely concealed her face, excepting from those directly in front of her. Her profile was toward the judges. The black background made her pallor almost ghastly. Her features were set and hard —a hopeless mask of chalk. She gave no sign that she had heard the President's words.

"You refuse to reply?" he went on. "You persist in keeping silent as you kept silent under examination? Let me beg of you, in your own interests, to speak. Your silence can only be harmful to your case. You refuse to speak?"— He paused again.

"The matter is in the hands of the jury. You shall hear the evidence against you. Clerk of the court, call the first witness!"

A stir and a murmur ran through the court as the President settled back in his chair and the

clerk called, "Victor Chouquet! Victor Chouquet!"

Perissard and Merivel had managed to secure seats well forward and watched the proceedings with the interest of experts.

"What did I tell you, my dear Merivel!" whispered the senior partner.

"It has all been arranged!"

"Of course it has!"

While they were awaiting the appearance of the boots of the Three Crowns, Raymond gazed curiously at his client. It was the first time he had ever seen her, and he was wondering what tragic story was masked behind her stony, inscrutable face. She did not seem to be aware that he was alive, and turning her head, glanced over the row of judges. Suddenly Raymond saw her eyes widen with horror and amazement. Her bosom heaved and her lips worked as if she were trying to speak. He rose hastily and leaned over the dock.

"What is the matter, madame? Are you ill?" he asked in quick undertone.

She turned to him with the jerky, uncertain movements of an automaton, but kept her eyes fastened on the bench.

"What—who—who is that gentleman—talking

to the judges?" she whispered. The words could barely be heard.

"President Floriot, from Toulouse," answered Raymond. He supposed that she had asked this apparently idle question to conceal the real thought that had caused her agitation, and so went on earnestly:

"Believe me, madame, your silence may lose your case for you. I beg you to speak!"

She drew the cloth more closely about her face and stared out over his head with wild eyes. With a shrug of his shoulders Raymond dropped back into his chair and turned to listen to the examination of Chouquet. He was beginning to feel more master of himself and more certain that his case was hopeless.

"State your name, age, and profession!" commanded the President as Victor took his stand behind the witness railing.

"Victor Emmanuel Chouquet, twenty-nine years of age, boots of the Hotel of the Three Crowns," replied Victor in his high-pitched drawl.

"Where do you live?"

"At the hotel, M. the President."

"You are no relation of the prisoner, are you, or in any way connected with her service?"

"No, M. the President."

"Raise your right hand!—Do you swear to speak without hatred or fear, to tell the whole truth? Say, 'I swear it.'"

"I swear it!" repeated the witness.

"Put down your hand. Give your evidence!"

Victor shuffled uneasily up against the railing and turned to the jury.

"On April 3d," he began, "a man and woman came to the hotel——"

"What time was it?" interrupted the President.

"It was a short time after lunch."

"Go on!"

"They had a trunk and a bag. I took them up to Room 24 on the top floor, and the man said, as he went into the room, 'Not a palace, is it?' And the woman said, 'Oh, what does it matter—this room or another one!' to which the man replied, 'Well, I don't suppose we will be here long.' Then they asked me for absinthe and cigarettes which I got for them, and the man asked me to leave the bottle."

"Did they drink much?" interrupted the President.

"I didn't notice."

"What was the attitude of the woman?"

"She didn't have any," replied Victor, and a titter ran over the benches. The court usher frowned and rapped on his desk.

"Did she look happy, sad, calm or nervous?" explained the President, irritably. Victor considered for several moments.

"She looked very tired," he replied.

"Go on!"

"Some time afterward my wife went up to their room for the police form and took down their names—M. and Mme. Laroque, from Buenos Ayres on their way to Paris."

"Your wife was at the hotel?"

"Yes, she was chambermaid there."

"Why has she not been called as a witness?" the judge demanded with a frown. Victor rubbed his hand across his eyes and snuffled.

"Because she's not there any longer. On the evening after the murder she left me and I haven't seen her since. A few days after she had gone she wrote me a note, saying, 'Don't worry about me. I am very happy. Take care of the child.'"

There was a quick shuffling of feet and exclamations of pity and sympathy swept across the court. The usher frowned and pounded his desk again. The President's face softened as he watched Vic-

tor wiping away his tears, and he gave him time to recover before requesting him to go on.

"At about half-past five, as I was taking water to a room on the same floor," said Victor at last, "I heard a shot fired and a shriek in Room 24. I rushed in and found M. Laroque lying on the floor in front of his wife, who held a smoking revolver in her hand. I took the revolver away from her and held her tight."

"Did she say anything?"

"She said, 'There's no hurry. I shan't try to get away.' Then the police came and took her off."

"That's all you know?"

"Yes, M. the President."

"The prisoner is the woman you call Madame Laroque, is she?"

Victor gazed at the white face above Raymond's head.

"Yes, M. the President," he said. The President looked in the same direction.

"Prisoner, you have heard the evidence of this witness? Have you anything to say?" he asked, solemnly.

Jacqueline had not heard the evidence. From the moment she recognized her husband a thou-

sand mad thoughts had stormed through her mind in a bewildering phantasmagoria. Her fierce hatred had given birth to a hundred fantastic schemes of vengeance that the situation made possible. Should she wait until her character and her shame had been painted their blackest and then tell the crowded court that he was her husband? Should she go to the place of execution and denounce him from the scaffold? No! She could not do that because of her boy. She had killed Laroque to hide her shame from her son. How could she proclam it now and make that terrible crime useless? But couldn't she tell just enough to show *him*—God! how she hated him! who she was and to what he had driven her? She could picture his face as he recognized her and listened to the horrible story of her degradation. She was glad that there was no vice so low that it had not soiled her; for thus the greater would be his anguish when she proclaimed it. . . .

"You insist on remaining silent?" the President was saying.

"Wait a little! Wait a little while!" she murmured, but so low that even Raymond could not catch the words.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, have you any questions

to ask the jury?" He paused and turned to M. Valmorin.

"Thank you, no, M. the President," bowed the Prosecutor.

"Has the counsel for the defense anything to ask the witness?"

The instinct of the cross-examiner triumphed over the nervousness of youth.

"The witness has mentioned that my client had been drinking absinthe," said Raymond, rising. His voice was sure and steady. "I should like to know whether he thinks she was intoxicated."

The President nodded and turned to Victor.

"You hear the question? Was the prisoner drunk or sober when you ran into the room and found her with the revolver in her hand?"

Victor shifted uneasily and appeared to hesitate.

"Well, she was very much excited," he said. "There's no doubt about that, M. the President. Her eyes were like a crazy woman's and her face was red and she didn't seem to know what she was doing."

A stir and murmur from the benches told Raymond that the audience credited him with a point scored.

"Would you say she was drunk?" he insisted.

"Well, some would say she was and some would say she wasn't," replied the witness, falling back on his never-failing formula.

A titter ran through the court at this conservative answer, and the president frowned.

"What would *you* say?" demanded Raymond. Victor's confusion was complete.

"I—I wouldn't say!" he stammered. Raymond turned back to his desk with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Counsel for the defense, have you any more questions to ask the witness?" demanded the court.

"No, M. the President," was the reply.

"Stand down!" commanded the President. "Clerk of the court, call the next witness!"

The next witness was Sergeant Fontaine, the gendarme who had arrested Jacqueline. He talked in jerky, military tones, and gave his evidence as if he were dictating an official report. He told of arresting her in the hotel and taking her to the prison.

"Did she say anything while you were taking her off?" asked the court.

"I did most of the talking," he replied. "I asked her why she had killed Laroque and she

said she had done it to prevent him doing a disgraceful thing which would have brought unhappiness and despair to some one she loved. I tried to make her say more, but she wouldn't. She said that she wouldn't say another word to anybody, and she didn't."

No one had any questions to ask the witness, though it was plain from the manner in which some of the jurors gazed at the prisoner that the policeman's testimony had made an impression. They were the usual run of jurors—plain middle-class tradesmen with a rather better than average intelligence; and, as Raymond looked them over, he felt that there was grim work ahead if he would upset their judgment and make them follow the impulse of emotion. He did not think he could do it.

Victor and the sergeant were the only two witnesses, and the President turned to Jacqueline when the gendarme had taken a seat beside Victor on the bench reserved for witnesses.

"Before calling on the Public Prosecutor," he said solemnly, "I ask you for the last time, prisoner, in your own interest, to tell the jury why you committed this crime. You told the policeman who arrested you, and who has just given his

evidence, that you killed Laroque to prevent him from committing an infamous and abominable act which would have caused trouble to some one you loved. To what act did you allude? To whom would it have brought trouble? Knowledge of the reasons which caused you to commit the murder may have an important influence on the jury in reaching a verdict. You refuse to speak? You have made up your mind to say nothing——"

He paused; and then:

"M. the Prosecutor!" he announced.

M. Valmorin rose slowly and bowed to the President, and then to the jury. It was an old story with him—the murder of a degenerate man by a fallen woman. He had only to go over an old formula.

"There you are!" whispered M. Perissard to his colleague. "It is practically over!"

"Gentlemen of the jury, I shall not keep you long," began M. Valmorin, in a gentle, pleasant voice. "The crime on which you have to give your verdict is simple and baneful. The woman has killed her lover—but who is this woman? What is her real name? Where does she come from? Who is she? We do not know! Since her arrest the prisoner has refused to answer all ques-

tions that have been put to her. She has not spoken a syllable in reply to the Examining Magistrate, and you have seen for yourselves that here in court she has insisted on remaining obstinately silent, although her silence cannot but harm her case—if she has the slightest shred of defense!

"There is sometimes an explanation of a murder—if not an excuse for it—to be found in the motives that inspired it. Murders are committed for reasons of money, for reasons of love, for reasons of jealousy, or to quench a thirst for vengeance. And the passion which arms the criminal's hand, which disturbs her power of reasoning and which makes her act without thinking—this, to some extent, diminishes her responsibility and the horror which the act of murder makes every man feel."

The jurors were leaning forward, their eyes fastened on his face and their reasons hypnotized by the musical, confident voice.

"When one or other of these reasons is brought forward, justice may be tempered with mercy. But how can you be asked to find excuses for an act, the motive of which the prisoner refuses to disclose? By this very refusal we may be for-

given for believing—nay, we are almost forced to believe that they are the worst possible motives. I distrust, for my part, the impenetrable mystery in which the prisoner has robed herself, and I can feel no pity for a guilty woman whose lips have not uttered a word of repentance!"

A loud, clear voice rang suddenly and sharply through the court.

"*I will speak presently!*"

A burst of laughter would not have been more disconcerting! M. Valmorin stopped, and every eye in the court was on the prisoner. Half of the men in the great room had started to their feet. The attitude and the look of suffering and the dark, hunted eyes were not visibly changed, but it was undoubtedly the woman who had spoken. The prosecutor bit his lip. Ten seconds before he had read in every eye in the jury-box, and in nearly every face in the courtroom, a placid acquiescence. Now there was pity in the glance of more than one of the twelve who would judge his case, and he would have to win them away from it. This would be harder than gaining their confidence at the outset had been.

The usher hammered the top of his desk until the excitement died away and there was order in

court once more. Then M. Valmorin began the work of repairing the damage.

"As I was saying, gentlemen of the jury, we know nothing about the woman Laroque," he continued, calmly, as if he considered of little importance the sensation that accompanied the dramatic interruption. "We have found no proof that she was ever a resident of France.

"In Buenos Ayres it is not known where she came from. During her stay in South America she did not, so far as we can learn, offend any of the laws of the country. In the month of March she took passage on board the Amazon for Bordeaux. Nothing particular was remarked about her during the trip, excepting that she told the fortunes of the passengers with a deck of cards—that she said she was certain she would die before long, and that she was in a great hurry to get back to France. This is all we know about her past.

"On the afternoon of April 3d she arrived at the Hotel of the Three Crowns, and at half-past five she killed her lover—a man whose past will not bear scrutiny, and who had been sentenced for theft on two occasions. You have heard the evidence of the servant with reference to the over-

excitement of the prisoner. I will draw no conclusion from this evidence, nor is it necessary to go into the question of the prisoner's moral responsibility, which overexcitement—caused by drink—may have affected. I will leave this phase of the case to my friend, the counsel for the defense—Maître Raymond Floriot——"

A frightful, unearthly shriek drowned the soothing voice of the prosecutor and brought every man and woman in the courtroom, pale-faced and startled, to their feet. Several women screamed, and the others stared, frightened at the prisoner. She was standing, rigid and swaying, head raised and eyes closed, her stiffened arms held close to her sides, her hands opening and closing convulsively. Two gendarmes seized her and tried to force her back into her chair.

"My God! My God!" she shrieked again and again. Raymond was beside her in a moment, his hand on her arm, begging her to be calm.

"For God's sake! Stop torturing that woman!" roared a man's voice from the audience.

It was the signal for a pandemonium! The usher pounded on his desk until the boards cracked, but the crowd lurched forward against the railing in a terrific uproar.

"Let her alone!"

"She's dying!"

"Great God! It's Jacqueline! It's Floriot's wife!" shouted Noel in Dr. Chennel's ear. And the next moment that elderly physician was over the railing like a boy. He burst through the gendarmes and rushed over to the dock. But Jacqueline was again in her seat and waved him back. He and Raymond bent over her.

"Are you ill? Shall I ask for an adjournment?" they asked breathlessly.

"No! No! No!" she panted, "I'm all right—all right!"

Her eyes were still closed and her lips worked as if she were trying to speak. Dr. Chennel's fingers closed over her left wrist. He leaned over and whispered reassuring words in her ear and gently patted her shoulder. The subtle magnetism of the physician seemed to have its effect at last and she slowly opened her eyes and sat up.

The din in the courtroom died as suddenly as it had begun, and the spectators shamefacedly sought their seats under the blazing eyes of the President.

He was livid with anger.

"This is the most disgraceful scene that ever

stained a French court!" he cried in a voice that trembled with suppressed rage. "If there is another sound from the benches during these proceedings I will order the gendarmes to clear the hall!"

Noel glanced quickly at his friend in his seat behind the judges to see if he, too, had recognized "the woman, Laroque."

Floriot's face was buried in his hands. He pressed a handkerchief so tightly to his eyes that Noel fancied he could see the whiteness of the nails. Any great blow—mental or physical—is immediately followed by a practically complete cessation of all activity of the senses. The mind —if it works at all—revolves around singular and ridiculous trifles, utterly foreign to the disaster or its effect. It was this condition that the recognition of Jacqueline left her husband. He was conscious that quiet had been restored and that Valmorin was continuing his speech, but the scene and its actors seemed remote from his life.

"As for the reason of the crime," the prosecutor was saying, "I repeat that we do not know it. Now that the prisoner has promised to speak, we may learn what it was."

Speak!—would she speak!—Raymond was stand-

ing half facing the prosecutor, his profile toward the woman. His right hand rested on the top of the railing in front of the dock. Jacqueline's eyes were on his handsome head, and in them there was unutterable love and unutterable dread. His delicate nostrils were quivering, and a touch of color came and went in his cheeks. He was watching Valmorin with eager, anxious eyes. Timidly, as a child, her hand crept out and closed softly over his fingers. He glanced up at her quickly, with what was meant to be a reassuring smile, but the early stage fright was returning. The prosecutor was nearing the end of his speech and in a few moments he must rise to reply. She drew her hand away, and he looked from it to the woman for a moment as if something remarkable had happened.

. . . An invisible band that has never been measured by our mortal standards binds mother and child together. It, alone of earthly ties, takes no count of Time or Space, and joy and degradation and wealth and want and woe alike are powerless to loosen. It has been called the only unselfish love, but it is not that. For, "damned in body and soul," the boy clings to his mother as to a promise of salvation; and a mother, dying in

shame and despair, yet sees in her child—Immortality! . . .

As if it had needed but that touch of the fingers to draw the cord tightly around his heart, Raymond felt for a moment that his soul was going out to the wretched woman that he had never seen until that day. Emotions that he had never known before were stirred to life. A desire to take her in his arms almost overpowered him. And what it meant to the mother only a mother may know. "Speak!" She would commit a thousand murders and go a thousand times to execution rather than utter a syllable now! . . .

"You, gentlemen of the jury, will weigh in the balance her sincerity and repentance with her guilt, and let your conscience be the judge of what punishment is proportionate to the crime she has committed."

There was a rustle and low murmur of whispered conversation as M. Valmorin resumed his seat.

"I don't think much of M. the Public Prosecutor," muttered M. Perissard. M. Merivel nodded his acquiescence without taking his eyes off the scene beyond the railing. The prisoner was huddled over the front of the dock, sobbing vio-

lently. The President gazed at her with pity in his eyes.

"Woman Laroque, will you answer my questions now?" he asked, kindly. She did not seem to hear.

"You said a few minutes ago that you would speak."

Jacqueline raised her wet, anguish-stricken face and held out both hands, as if warding off a blow.

"No! Never! Never!" she cried, wildly, and sank down again.

"Take time for reflection, and let me, for the last time, advise you not to remain obstinate!" persisted the judge.

There was no reply save a storm of weeping that shook the dock. Murmurs of pity rose again and the usher rapped sharply on his desk for attention.

"Counsel for the defense!" called the President.

CHAPTER XXI

CHERCHEZ L'HOMME

Raymond straightened up with an effort and turned to face the jury. His face was almost as white as the prisoner's. His lips trembled and his eyes burned. From the moment the woman had pressed his hand he had been struggling with an emotion more unnerving than stage fright. Hitherto he had known misery only as we who never stir from home know the suffering of an arctic explorer. For the first time in his life he had been thrown into actual contact with the raw reality, stripped of the veneer and varnish of the story-teller. When he looked at the crouching woman and felt the railing tremble with her sobs he dimly understood the despair that could welcome death as a friend. If he had only known—if he could only have felt this way when he had written his speech! What was his speech? How did it begin? His eye met his father's for a wavering instant and the frightened gaze and

livid features of the stern magistrate completed the demoralization of his son. His father saw that he would fail and shame him, he thought! He dared not glance toward Helene. He must begin! He fixed his eyes on a light stain on the dark wood of the jury-box and tried to remember the opening words of his address. They would not come. The overwhelming sense of failure, the foreknowledge that he could not make the jury feel the flood of emotion that had paralyzed his tongue, brought tears to his eyes!

The courtroom was preternaturally still. A juryman coughed, and at the sound Raymond felt an overmastering impulse to scream or run out. There was a long-drawn sob behind him and he straightened up—rigid. He raised his eyes and the jury-box was a gray-black blur. His lips felt stiff and his tongue dry—but he must begin! He bowed stiffly and hurriedly to the bench and quickly drew the back of his hand across his eyes, to clear away the mist of tears. . . .

"Gentlemen—of the jury!" His voice sounded strange to his own ears, and he leaned with both hands on the table. What were his opening words? —It was useless! But he must stumble on some way!

"I cannot—I will not try—to conceal—the very great emotion that I feel! I hope—you must pardon me——" He met the eyes of one of the jurors, and instead of the contempt and amusement that he had expected he saw a gleam of sympathy. Oh, if he had only the power to play upon it! Why couldn't he remember his speech? He could only tell them how he felt, and plead for mercy for the woman.

"My wish is to be cool—and to keep calm—but my eyes fill with tears in spite of all—my efforts." And again he quickly dashed his hand across his eyes. He looked up at the men, who must judge him and his speech, with almost piteous bravery.

"My heart is beating—quicker than it should! My voice is trembling—and it is all that I can do to keep from breaking down and crying like a child instead of pleading for my client—here before you. I crave your indulgence for this weakness—but it does not make me blush!" He threw back his head, and at last he saw the jurors clearly before him.

"It is the first time in my life that I have come close to the bitterness of a woman's grief and misery and—my heart is torn by the fear that I

shall not be able to prove myself equal to the noble task that I have undertaken!"

He paused and wet his dry lips with his tongue.

"I can find none of the arguments that I had prepared for the purpose of moving and convincing you, and my ready-made phrases have vanished from my brain, dispersed by one glance at the suffering and distress of this poor woman!

"Look at her, gentlemen! No words of mine can have the power of tears to move you to mercy!"

There was a falter and piteous break in his voice as he half turned and laid his hand on the dock. There was not another sound save the woman's sobs. The faces of the jurors told him that they were listening with eager attention and the fear of being made ridiculous began to pass. Blindly, instinctively, he had stumbled on to the greatest rule of the greatest orator that ever lived: "Be earnest!"

In those few minutes the jurymen had felt the force of clean emotion, of noble purpose, behind the stumbling words, and they waited breathlessly. With the growing confidence some of the arguments that he had embodied in his written speech came back to him; but he could not remember the words.

"And there is a mystery—a veil of mystery which has not been torn by the evidence and still surrounds this woman for whom I am pleading," he went on. "Who is this weeping and despairing woman? Where does she come from, and why did she kill the man with whom she lived? We do not know!" His voice was gaining a strong, commanding ring.

"She alone can rend this veil that surrounds her life, and she refuses to do so! She alone knows the secret and keeps it! Why? So as to mislead the cause of justice? Certainly not! For if that were her object, she would speak. She would try to justify herself. She would lie, so as to appear innocent!

"She could find a dozen plausible reasons for the murder of her lover! A quarrel, a violence on his part, a momentary madness—nobody could give her the lie. Nobody saw or heard what happened immediately before the murder; and Laroque, the only person in the room besides the prisoner, is dead! But my client has disdained all subterfuge! She knew perfectly well what the consequence of her act would be—*and—she—has not—tried—to—escape it!*

"'There's no hurry,' she said to the boots of the

hotel, who wrenched the revolver from her hand. 'I sha'n't try to get away.' And since then she has been silent. Why? Her own words tell us why, gentlemen, and will lift a corner of the curtain which hides the truth from us!

"The policeman who arrested her has told us that he asked the prisoner why she killed Laroque, and that she answered: 'I killed him to prevent him from doing an infamous and shameful thing which would have brought misfortune on some one I love!'

"'This, gentlemen,' he cried, his voice rising, "tells us the secret of this poor creature!

"'She killed this man Laroque, of whose past—as my friend the Public Prosecutor rightly said—no good was known. She killed this man who has, on two occasions, undergone punishment for theft and was capable of anything. *She killed him, because taking his life was the only way she could prevent an infamy that would have brought shame and despair on some one she loved!*

"Does this not explain the insistency of her silence? This woman, this poor wreck, who has been beaten down to the lowest rungs of the ladder of physical and moral misery, this wretched creature—*loves!* Good women will sweep their

skirts from her touch in the streets, but love is in her heart, and the happiness of him or her whom she loves is dearer to her than her own life!

"One day she sees a menace to this happiness and kills—kills without hesitation the scoundrel who was about to destroy it!"

Gone was the stage fright—gone the fear of failure! As the ear of a musician tells him when his hands have found a chord, so is there a psychic ear which tells the orator that the spirit of his audience is in harmony with his words. As this telepathic message reached his brain, Raymond felt at last within him the power to move the hearts of men. Words poured forth in a rushing flood!

"Love was the motive that made her a criminal! Love, and love only! And whom does she love to the sacrifice of herself? Is it a father who is respected and honored by all in his old age? Is it a husband or lover to whom she has been false and whom she left long ago? Is it a child who knows nothing of his mother's shame and lives unconscious and happy?

"We do not know! But some such love is the secret of my client and the reason of her silence. She cares nothing for what men may say of her,

nor for man's judgment of her! She does not care for her own life, and sacrifices it with gladness! But she will not let herself be known! There is only one single being of importance to her, and she will not let her name be spoken lest the sentence stain her picture in the heart of the one she worships!

"Gentlemen of the jury, a woman who can feel like this is no vulgar criminal! I feel sure that I shall prove to you that it is no mere criminal who stands before you! The police have moved heaven and earth to establish her identity, and they have failed. This is alone sufficient proof that this crime is her first; for had she been convicted before, the police would have found traces of her past!

"And there is no doubt, gentlemen"—his voice was vibrant and his eyes flashed through the tears —"there is no doubt that a man was originally responsible for my client's fall. When a woman falls and rolls in the gutter, it is not with her that we should feel indignant—it is not against her breast that we should cast the stones!

"A man has done this thing!" he shouted, his features quivering. "He has seduced or ill-treated her! He is a lover without scruple, or a husband

with too little nobility of character and too much pride—a husband who has not known how to pity, and who sentenced her for a first fall to a life of sin!

"The laws of man are powerless against such a lover or such a husband," he cried, stepping forward with clenched fist above his head, "but God sees him—and God judges him!

"Such a man has made this woman what you see her to-day, and he alone is responsible!" He paused and gulped to swallow an imaginary something in his throat. Then he went on bitterly:

"He, no doubt, lives happily—his name respected and his conscience calm! But in the eyes of Eternal Justice this man stands by this woman's side, or lower still! And in the name of a higher law, in the name of your mothers and sisters, I call upon you to do justice—with pity—to this woman whose life has been the plaything of the man who should stand in her place!"

He paused again. His head felt hot and his feet cold. He knew that he had not used a syllable of his original speech, but words and phrases that he had never dreamed of before leaped to his tongue in battalions. His voice, that had been hoarse and uncertain at the opening, was

now true to every changing note of his heart. Without looking in their direction he was conscious that Helene and Rose were crying. From the audience he heard the strained coughing of men and the muffled weeping of women. He glanced toward the bench and saw, with vague wonder, his father's bowed and shaking figure. His eloquence had even moved that iron judge, he thought! He could not know the agony of which he was the author! He could not dream that the generous wrath that flamed up from his pure heart had made his tongue a lash for his father's soul! Noel, watching and listening, his eyes shaded by his hand, felt the terrible torture of his friend, and twice half-rose as if he would interrupt the boy's bitter arraignment of his father. But Raymond swept on with his speech.

"In the course of the eloquent address for the prosecution my friend reminded us that murder might sometimes be worthy of forgiveness, and that the wave of passion which causes murder sometimes excuses it.

"Gentlemen, I ask you on your consciences—*is this woman guilty?* Does she deserve punishment for wiping out of existence the pestilent criminal who was threatening the happiness of the one per-

son she loved? Does this unfortunate woman deserve punishment for the silence she has kept heroically to save her name from scandal—and for whom? For the sake of another!

"No, gentlemen, a thousand times—*No!* At the mere thought my heart cries out in protest! And you will, I know, gentlemen, share my emotion—and my conviction!

"Gentlemen of the jury, my cause is just, and the verdict will bear witness to its justice! I await it without fear! Were you to find my client guilty—even with extenuating circumstances—your verdict would only prove that I have not been equal to my task!

"And I should never cease to regret my lack of ability to make you feel those sentiments and convictions which bid me declare in a loud voice, with my hand upon my heart—*this woman is not guilty!*"

CHAPTER XXII

MADAME X SPEAKS

The speech was over. For a moment there was an awed hush. Then Raymond dropped heavily into his chair—exhausted and limp. His body lay half-way across the table, his face buried in his arms. He did not know until it was all over what the effort had cost in nervous force. A listless indifference and the feeling that he had failed came as a reaction to the exaltation of a moment before.

A quivering sigh swept through the room, followed by sounds of snuffling and the violent blowing of noses! And the spell was broken. The President drew a long breath and was turning to address the jury when there was an unexpected interruption. Victor Chouquet, who probably alone of those in the courtroom had been unmoved—for the reason that he couldn't understand—had had time to look around him with boorish curiosity. He had seen two men who, while they were

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *Madame X.*

LAROQUE WARNS MADAME X NOT TO JOKE BEFORE HIS TWO FRIENDS, MERIVEL AND PERISSARD.

dry-eyed, were listening with the appreciation of experts.

"Excuse me, M. the President!" he cried, in his high drawl. The President started.

"Who is speaking?"

"I, M. the President!" And Victor rose. The judge glanced at him impatiently.

"Have you anything else to say?"

"Yes, M. the President."

"Well? You may speak."

Victor did not lose any time. It had taken his dull mind some fifteen or twenty minutes to connect cause and effect, and he was ready. He turned and pointed along the front of the benches to the spot where the partners in confidential missions were seated.

"Those two over there came to the hotel and asked for M. Laroque before the boat came in," he said. "They came back and saw him after he arrived, and I took them up to his room. They went out with M. Laroque and stayed a long time. He came back about fifteen or twenty minutes before the murder was committed."

The judges and court officers gazed sharply at the two men, who were trying to conceal themselves behind the other spectators.

"This is important!" muttered the President. "Have you anything else to say?"

"No, monsieur," replied Victor, resuming his seat.

"Usher, bring those two men to the bar!" commanded the President. "I have discretionary powers to question them as witnesses, although they have not previously been summoned—and I will use it."

The "confidential agents" looked nervously around the room as if seeking some way of escape as the usher advanced on them.

"For pity's sake, be careful!" whispered Perissard, anxiously. "Keep your mouth shut and leave it to me!"

"Don't worry! I won't say a word!" replied his colleague in the same tone.

"Gentlemen, if you please, this way!" cried the usher from the railing. As they came into the enclosure the President thought of something.

"Let one of them step forward and the other be taken to the waiting-room," he ordered. With another quick warning look at his confrère, M. Perissard walked up to the witness-stand while a gendarme escorted the other out behind the dock.

With one hand resting lightly on the railing in

front of the witness-stand and the other nursing his immaculate silk hat, M. Perissard surveyed the judges and jury with an oily, benevolent smile.

"Your name and surname?" demanded the President.

"Perissard—Robert Henri!" replied the witness in his most unctuous tones, accompanying the answer with a half-bow.

"Your age?"

"Fifty-nine years, M. the President!"

"Your profession," continued the judge.

"Confidential missions," was the reply, with another bend.

"Your address?"

"No. 62 Rue Fribourg, Paris."

"Tell us what you know about the murder of Laroque!" the President commanded, and leaned back in his chair. M. Perissard's manner had not deceived him in the slightest measure. He knew the breed; and, knowing that the witness was a shrewd man, he tried to put him at a disadvantage by making him tell the story without questions.

But M. Perissard knew the danger of that system of examination as well as did the President.

"I know nothing about it at all, M. the Presi-

dent!" he declared earnestly. "I know absolutely nothing! And I cannot understand——"

"Did you know Laroque?" interrupted the judge, abruptly. M. Perissard shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other.

"I used to know him years ago in Paris," he admitted, with a fine air of candor. "About six months ago I received a letter from him asking for work. I offered him a place in my office, and I went to see him when he arrived. That's all!"

Something familiar in the sound of his voice brought Floriot out of the stupor that succeeded the agony he had suffered. He raised his haggard face from his hands and met M. Perissard's eyes fixed upon him. He recognized him at once.

"Did you come from Paris to Bordeaux on purpose to see him?" pursued the examiner.

"No, M. the President, I had to come to Bordeaux to start a branch of my Paris house here."

"Is that the reason of your coming here to-day?"

M. Perissard paused and fixed his glance slowly and meaningly on the President of the Toulouse Court, over the judge's shoulder.

"No, M. the President," he said with deliberation. "I came to Bordeaux on a special matter of business, the business of one of my clients—a very

delicate affair! It concerns the honor of a well-known family, and I hope to carry it through successfully. I am honorably known in my profession, and my clients know that they can always reckon—*always* reckon, I repeat—on my entire discretion!"

"What did you say to Laroque in the course of your conversation with him?" continued the President.

"Nothing much, nothing much!" M. Perissard assured him, with an offhand gesture. "It was a business talk, in which I gave him a few general instructions about the work of my office. That is all!"

"You do not know anything about the shooting?"

"Not a thing, M. the President!" was the emphatic reply.

"Do you know the prisoner?"

M. Perissard turned and gave Jacqueline a long and careful scrutiny, as if he were not certain that he had ever seen her before.

"I saw her with Laroque," he said at last, "but I do not know who she is."

"You may——" began the President and stopped with a start. The prisoner was slowly rising. Her body was tense, and she leaned forward out

of the dock with one rigid arm pointing at Perissard. With the black garb, livid face, and burning eyes and the clawlike hand pointing at the witness—whose fat pink cheeks had suddenly paled—she was like some uncanny sibyl about to launch a curse.

"But *I* know *you!*" she cried in a hoarse voice that carried to the farthest corner. "*You are the real cause of the murder!*"

In a moment the audience was on its feet.

"I! I!" cried the blackmailer, stepping back with well-feigned astonishment while the usher hammered at his desk and shouted for order. But even the President was too much absorbed in the sudden dramatic development to heed the excitement in the court.

"Yes, *you!*" she repeated, stabbing at him with her stiff forefinger. "You found out that I was married and that I had left my husband, and you advised Laroque to find him and ask him for the money that I brought him on my marriage!"

M. Perissard had been in many a tight place—in many a situation where self-possession and nerve had saved him—and he quickly recovered from the shock of the denunciation. Ignoring the excite-

ment that had upset the decorum of the court he turned to the President and said suavely:

"M. the President, Laroque told me during our conversation that his wife had had typhoid fever last year and that her brain had suffered."

But the woman was not to be silenced by such a trick.

"I nearly died last year, and my head was shaved," she said, slowly, turning and looking straight at Floriot, who was watching her with grief-stricken eyes. "That is why those who used to know me cannot recognize me now!"

Floriot hid his face in his hands and shuddered. Noel, white-faced, was gripping the railing in front of him with both hands.

"But I am not mad!" she cried, her voice rising to a shrill note as she faced Perissard once more. "I begged and prayed Laroque not to follow your hateful advice, and he refused to listen to me. As I would not run the risk of his seeing and speaking to my son, *I killed him!*"

Muttered imprecations and half-smothered exclamations of anger swept through the court, and the throng heaved forward against the railings. Raymond sprang up into the dock and with one arm around the woman's waist and the other

resting on the arm nearest him, he gently forced her down into her chair once more. The usher pounded his desk and the gendarmes struggled to push the crowd back from the railing. It was several minutes before order was restored, but the President, hastily consulting his confrères on the bench, paid no heed.

"You may go!" he said, when the room had reached almost its normal semi-hush and the voices had dropped into excited whisperings. "Call the other witness!"

M. Perissard started hurriedly for the door, but at a signal from M. Valmorin the gendarmes stopped him.

"No, M. Perissard," said the prosecutor. "Do not leave the court, if you please. We may want you again."

"The presiding judge said I could go, and I have important business!" protested the blackmailer.

"And I ask you to stay!" repeated M. Valmorin, firmly. "Kindly sit down!"

He was escorted, muttering and grumbling, to the witnesses' bench.

"I really don't understand! It's disgraceful!" he fumed. "I was not regularly cited—Article 313 of the Code of Criminal Instruction. It's a shame!"

But no one paid any further attention to him, excepting a few jurors and the nearest of the spectators, who favored him with curious and unpleasant glances. The usher brought M. Merivel to the stand. He came with mincing steps, and many bows, and a confident smirk on his fat, heavy face.

The President eyed him with rather more dislike than he had shown for the other partner.

"Your name and surname!" he commanded, curtly.

"Merivel—Modiste Hyacinthe!" replied the junior partner, in his blandest professional tones.

"Your age?"

"Fifty-two years, M. the President!"

"Your profession?"

"Confidential missions!" replied M. Merivel, with an obsequious bow.

"Your address!" demanded the judge.

"No. 132 Rue St. Denis, Paris."

"What do you know about the murder of Laroque?"

M. Merivel threw open his hands and drew himself up.

"Nothing, M. the President!" he declared.

"Nothing?" questioned the judge with a frown.

"Nothing whatever!" M. Merivel assured him with much earnestness.

"Did you know Laroque?" was the next question.

"No, M. the President," was the prompt reply.

"Had you never seen him?"

"Never!" exclaimed the witness, without hesitation. Some one tittered and M. Perissard cursed his colleague heartily under his breath.

"You did not go to see him in his room at the Hotel of the Three Crowns on April 3d?"

"No, M. the President!" replied M. Merivel, with a solemn shake of the head. A ripple of laughter ran along the benches and M. Merivel began to perspire. His glance wavered before the President's stern eye.

"Be careful! The hotel people saw you!" he warned. M. Merivel glanced uneasily at his partner for a cue, but Perissard was afraid to give him a sign.

"They must have made a mistake, M. the President!" he said, at last, with a great assumption of firmness.

"Oh, what an ass!" growled his partner fiercely.

M. Valmorin rose suddenly.

"M. the President," he said, "the attitude of

these two men is distinctly suspicious, and, by virtue of Article 330 of the Code of Criminal Instruction, I ask you to order their immediate arrest for perjury!"

M. Perissard bounded up with agility that fitted strangely with his corpulent figure.

"Look here!" he shouted angrily, "it isn't my fault if that fool——"

"Who are you calling a fool?" demanded his partner, advancing belligerently.

"Gendarmes, remove those two men!" commanded the President.

"I protest——" began M. Merivel, loudly, holding up his hand.

"You have no right to do this! It is perfectly——" stormed the other.

"Take them away!" interrupted the judge.

"I'll have my revenge!" foamed M. Merivel, in a voice that made the chairs tremble, as the gendarmes laid hold of him.

"Shut your mouth, you d——d idiot!" roared the other.

"I'll write to the papers! I'll——" And struggling, and threatening, cursing the court and each other, they were dragged off to be held on charges of perjury, while the crowd hissed them out. And

this, it may be remarked here, ended their long careers of crookedness. Merivel was convicted of perjury, but the case against the senior partner could not be made to hold. Merivel was so enraged when the other was acquitted that he turned State's evidence and gave M. Valmorin the history of some of Perissard's "deals," with the result that both were sent to prison for long terms.

When the excitement attending the exit of the pair had subsided the President made one last appeal to the prisoner before giving the case to the jury.

"Woman Laroque," he said, gently, with a slight hesitation at the name, "have you anything to say in your defense? Tell the truth and the whole truth!"

To his astonishment, the woman slowly rose. A hush of eager expectancy fell over the room. Looking straight before her into the dead wall she began in a low, uncertain tone.

"My counsel has said all that could be said. I shall never forget his words, and I thank him from my heart!" The voice trembled and stopped.

"He was right!" she went on, unsteadily, her hands tightly clutching the desk as she struggled for control. "I was not naturally bad! A coward

broke my life and made me what I have become!"

The President heard a muffled groan behind him where his guest was sitting, but he did not take his eyes off the woman's face.

"I had wronged him, I admit, but I was sorry—and hated myself for my fault. I begged his pardon—begged for it on my knees! And he told me to go—threw me out into the streets! Me! His wife—the mother of his child!

"Thanks to him I rolled in the gutter! Thanks to him I have suffered a thousand deaths—*and I have killed!* I hate him! I hate him!" she cried wildly, her voice shaking with passion. "And with my last breath I will curse his name!"

She paused with a gasp and swallowed hard. Floriot sat with his face in his hands and his heaving shoulders told the story of his agony. Rose and Helene, their heads close together, were openly crying, and there were sounds of sobbing and snuffling from all over the room. The jury sat like twelve men hypnotized. Raymond stood looking up into her face, while a hundred emotions swept him. The feeling of pity, the desire to comfort, that had moved him when she pressed his hand, returned with reawakened force. He

could not know it—but she dared not glance down at him.

"And yet I do not complain," she went on, with a strange note of tenderness. "No, I do not complain! I have a son—a son whom I love, whom I love more than I can say!"

Once more she paused, and when she spoke again some of the excitement under which she had labored returned.

"But he does not know me!" she cried. "The sound of my voice—thank God!—can awaken no echo in his heart! He will never see me again—know nothing of my shame and," she faltered, "his memory of me will be vague and sweet and beautiful; for—when I became—lost to him—he was a child! He is so far—from me—now! But I love him! I worship him! All my heart is his. My one wish—is that he—should be happy—that—ah!"

The words ended in a long-drawn sob and she sank into her chair, huddled over the desk.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VERDICT

Eloquent and earnest as had been Raymond's impassioned outburst it hardly moved the throng as did the woman's short and broken confession. In the hearts of all men and women who are worthy of the name there is ever pity for a fallen woman; but in this case there was something more than that. Pity for the wrecks of vice is often tempered by the instinctive feeling that the lost are mercifully drugged by their own excesses until they are incapable of realizing fully that they have fallen beyond the reach of redemption.

But here there was none of that. In that prayer for her son, every mother in the room heard a mother crying out to her across an unbridgeable gulf—every man knew that the woman's soul was writhing under the torture of seeing herself as she was; and the soft weeping and the pressed lips and shining eyes were eloquent of their emotion.

Even the old President felt the spell, and it was

with an effort that he took his eyes off the bowed figure with Raymond bending over it and turned to address the jury. At his first words—delivered in a matter-of-fact "legal" tone—a rustle and stir ran over the benches. It was over.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "you have to answer this question: Is the prisoner guilty of the murder committed on April 3d, on the body of her lover, Frederick Laroque? If the majority of you believe that the prisoner is guilty or not guilty, your verdict will be worded accordingly.

"If the majority of you believe, on the other hand, that there are extenuating circumstances, you are to give your verdict in these words:

"'The majority of the jurors believe that there are extenuating circumstances in favor of the prisoner.'

"I point out to you that your vote must be a secret one. Kindly withdraw to the jury-room. The court is rising!"

As he spoke he rose, accompanied by the other judges and moved toward the door of his private room, opening off the "bank." The usher pounded his desk.

"The court is rising!" he repeated in a loud tone. With the shuffling of many feet the throng

rose and the hum of conversation filled the room. Escorted by two gendarmes, Jacqueline was taken out to the prisoner's room to await the verdict.

Floriot, walking like a drunken man, went out with M. Valmorin to the latter's little office. Noel tried to reach him, but he disappeared before he could cross the court. Dr. Chennel followed him and Raymond suddenly stopped them, returning from the door of the prisoner's room, where he had accompanied the woman.

The big hall was practically deserted. Helene had quickly recovered from her emotion in her pride in Raymond, but Rose wept inconsolably, and the girl led her out to the open air.

Raymond eagerly seized the hands of his father's friends.

"Do you think she will get off, doctor?" he asked, quickly.

"I hope so," responded the surgeon with an affectionate smile; "and if she does, she may thank you, my boy!"

"Is that so?" he exclaimed, with a pleased little laugh and nervous toss of his head. "I thought I was awfully bad!"

"And I thought you were marvelous!" rejoined Noel, with unmistakable meaning. He was look-

ing curiously at the young man's flushed and handsome face.

"Oh, come now!" protested Raymond.

"I mean it. You reached me—and not only me!" he added half to himself.

Raymond shook his hand with hearty gratitude.

"It's awfully good of you to tell me these things," he said, "and I'm mighty proud of one thing! Do you know that I made my father cry? I did, for a fact! 'The Man of Bronze,' some one told me they call him! I managed to glance at him a couple of times, and I'm sure he was crying!

"Now, that's a success, you know! For a young fellow like me to make the presiding judge of another criminal court cry over his first speech is pretty good, whether the young lawyer is the judge's son or not!

"My, but I was nervous! That poor woman completely upset me. You remember when she called out and nearly fainted?"

The others nodded.

"Yes," said Noel. "You turned around and looked up and spoke to her, I think."

"Exactly!" Raymond rattled on, excitedly. "I put my hand on the edge of the rail and she took

hold of it, and pressed it, and—do you know, I forgot all about my speech, and everything else? It's a fact! She looked at me in the most extraordinary way!"

He paused a moment and then went on soberly, with a vague, puzzled look in his dark eyes.

"She drew me toward her, somehow. I don't know how to explain it to you. I wanted to take her in my arms and console her and kiss her—yes, kiss her! Kind of foolish, eh?" he added, with a quick smile. "Queer sort of a lawyer who'd want to kiss his clients, isn't it? But I swear that's what I did want! It was one of the most extraordinary sensations I have ever felt, and it upset me so that I caught myself talking for a full minute without knowing what I was saying. Luckily, I sort of got hold of myself, and—and—I'm almighty glad it's all over. Ah, here comes the President of the Toulouse court!"

His few minutes in M. Valmorin's office had partially restored Floriot's steel nerves. He took a drink of water and gently put aside the prosecutor's solicitous questions, and then he hurried out to find his son, knowing that the boy would feel hurt if he was not among the first to congratulate him. But his white, lined face and hag-

gard eyes bore witness to the terrible suffering of the recent ordeal.

Raymond hastened forward a few steps to meet him.

"Thank you, my boy, thank you!" said Floriot, unsteadily, as he gripped his son's hand. "It was a noble speech!"

Then he dropped wearily into a chair. Raymond stared at him, startled.

"Why, is anything the matter, father?" he cried, stepping quickly over to his side.

Floriot raised his hand as if to motion him away.

"No! Nothing, nothing!" he replied.

"I think Mademoiselle Valmorin wants to speak to you, Raymond," interrupted Noel, hurriedly. The young man threw a quick look up toward the benches and saw that Helene had returned and was trying to telegraph him with her eyes. A father's claims must always yield to a lover's, and with a lingering glance at the figure in the chair, Raymond hurried off to his sweetheart's side.

Noel put his hand under Floriot's arm and drew him off to a corner by the bench, where they were partially hidden, while Dr. Chennel did sentry duty in the background.

"You recognized her, of course?" said Floriot, in a low broken voice, without meeting his friend's eye.

Noel nodded, but did not speak.

"There's no doubt about it!" went on his friend. "It is Jacqueline, and this is what she has become! This is my work! Jacqueline! Jacqueline!" he groaned, piteously.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Noel. The effort to control himself made his voice sound hard. Floriot shook his head miserably.

"I don't know!" he groaned. "What do you think?"

"It doesn't seem to me," retorted Noel, bitterly, "that this is exactly a time for thinking! If she should be convicted, maybe it would be better to let things take their natural course and never let Raymond know who she was. But if she is acquitted, you will have to tell him, and we will have to do what we can to—to—wipe out twenty years!"

Floriot's only reply for a moment was a dry sob. Then:

"How can I tell him—*now!* God!" he cried, "he will add his curses to hers! I will lose him! I——"

The sharp clang of a bell broke in. Noel started. It was the signal that the court was coming in.

"Already!" he exclaimed. "The jury didn't take long!" He hastily gripped his friend's hand as the door of the President's room opened, and pushed him toward his seat.

"Keep your heart, old man!" he added, kindly. "We'll come through all right!"

Raymond brushed against him as he walked back to his seat. His ears were singing with Helene's whispers.

"It's a good sign, isn't it?" he said in low, eager tones. Noel nodded and passed outside the railing. The crowd was swarming in from both doors, and by the time the judges had comfortably settled themselves the hall was packed once more. The jury filed slowly into the box and sat down. The usher rapped for silence. There was not a sound in the court when the President solemnly commanded:

"Gentlemen of the jury, give your verdict!"

The foreman, a round-faced, dry-goods salesman, plainly oppressed by the importance of his position, rose, and, with his right hand over his heart, declared, in husky tones:

"On my honor and on my conscience, before God and before men, the declaration of the jury is:

"No, the prisoner is not guilty!"

A gasp swept across the hall, and then the great throng burst into a cheer. Men sprang up and slapped each other on the back, and women, with tear-stained faces, frantically waved their limp handkerchiefs. Rose gave Helene a convulsive hug, and it was returned with interest. Sergeant Fontaine so far forgot his official reserve as to seize Victor's hand and shake it with enthusiasm, while he twisted his mustache violently with the other. Raymond was trying to combine the dignity of an advocate with an expression of rapturous delight. The usher hammered his desk and the gendarmes shouted for order. Only Floriot sat with bowed head, and Noel watched him under the hand that shaded his eyes. Evidently feeling that the shortest way was the quickest, the President ordered the usher to bring in the prisoner.

As soon as the door opened and the woman walked slowly in between the gendarmes, the din fell away to a tense hush. There was a spot of color in her cheeks that had not been there before, and her eyes were wilder. Dr. Chennel gazed at her with close scrutiny.

"She has a very high fever!" he whispered to Noel. The latter nodded, without turning his head.

"Clerk of the court, read the declaration of the jury!" commanded the President. The clerk, who had been busily writing out that document in the form prescribed, rose with the paper in his hand and read, in a droning monotone:

"The declaration of the jury is: No, the prisoner is not guilty. In consequence whereof the court proclaims the prisoner's innocence of the crime of which she is accused, orders her acquittal, and orders that she be immediately set at liberty, unless there be other reason for her detention. The court is risen!"

The last words were lost in a frightful shriek from the prisoner.

"*No! No! No!*" she screamed, struggling in the grip of the two guards as she tried to throw herself out of the dock. "*Let me die! I want to die! I want to die!*"

In an instant the court was again in an uproar with oaths, cries of anger, and shrieks of women. The crowd swept forward to the railing.

"Clear the court!" roared the President; and the gendarmes threw themselves into the press,

driving the packed men and women toward the exits. The din was terrific, and above it all rose Jacqueline's screams.

"*I want to die! I want to die!*"

Raymond was the first to reach her, closely followed by Dr. Chennel and Noel, and then Floriot.

"*For God's sake, doctor! Help her!*" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GUTTERING FLAME

As the rear of the hysterical mob was driven from the hall and the doors locked, Jacqueline collapsed into her chair, unconscious. At the same moment the President hurried up, pulling on his street coat.

"Carry her into my room!" he commanded. The two muscular gendarmes picked her up, chair and all, and carried her into the little dressing-room. Then, with a sign, he dismissed them and immediately followed himself, leaving the little party alone.

Leaving Helene in her father's care, Rose followed the solemn little procession into the President's room. Dr. Chennel met her at the door and gave her a few hasty orders as to medicine, and she hurried away. Then he turned to the patient.

In a moment he had Noel administering smelling salts and Raymond moistening her temples with cologne, which he produced from his emer-

gency bag. Floriot, with white, compressed lips and frightened eyes, stood watching as the doctor felt her pulse, listened with ear to her heart, and turned back the lids of the sightless eyes.

Floriot was the first to speak.

"Is she—in danger?" he whispered, [brokenly. The doctor slowly shook his head.

"I can't tell yet," he replied, without taking his eyes off her face. "Her heart is undoubtedly badly affected. It is worn out—like the rest of her. My great fear is that she may die of utter exhaustion."

Floriot turned away with an inarticulate groan.

"Doctor! I think she moved just now!" exclaimed Noel. The doctor was watching her face keenly.

"Yes, she's coming around all right," he nodded. "This crisis is over, but——" He shrugged his shoulders.

The dark eyelids trembled and slowly opened. There was a long, fluttering sigh. Dr. Chennel bent over.

"How do you feel now?" he asked. She swallowed slowly once or twice, and looked listlessly at the circle of faces around her. Floriot was standing where he could not be seen.

"Not well," she murmured, feebly. "I'm all broken up. I—don't—seem to have—any strength. Where am I?"

"In the law courts—in the President's room," replied Chennel. She started, as if to rise.

"The President's!" she gasped. Her brain was still hazy, but she could think of only one President. Noel seemed to divine something of what was in her mind, for he threw Floriot in the background a look that said: "Leave this to me!" Floriot opened the door and stumbled out. At an imperative gesture from Noel, Raymond followed him.

When the door had closed behind them, Noel bent over until his lips all but touched the woman's ear.

"Jacqueline!" he murmured. She looked up at him with dull eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked, indifferently. "You seem to know my name—who are you?"

He looked steadily and tenderly into her eyes.

"Don't you remember me?"

She shook her head.

"But I'm sure you haven't altogether forgotten me!" he insisted, gently. She studied his face for

several moments and then recognition slowly dawned in her eyes.

"Wait a minute! But—no, it's impossible! It can't be!" she cried, excitedly. Dr. Chennel tactfully stepped back to the opposite side of the little room.

"Little Jenny Wren!" whispered Noel.

"*Noel! Noel! You!*" she cried, clutching his arm and looking hungrily up into his face.

"Yes, it's Noel!" he smiled. She seized his hand and pressed it again and again to her cheek.

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!" she sobbed. "I'm no longer alone! Noel! Noel! Noel!"

"Are you really as glad as all that to see me again, Jennie Wren?" he whispered, tenderly. He sat on the arm of the chair and she clung to him as if she were afraid he might disappear as suddenly as he had come.

"Noel! Noel! Pity me! Pity me!" she sobbed.

He gently laid his fingers across her lips.

"Don't talk of pity!" he whispered. "Everything is forgotten!"

"Ah! As if I could ever forget!" she moaned.

"Of course, you can!" he cried, cuddling her up close to him. "It was all a nightmare, and you're awake now. Don't cry, Jacqueline, don't cry!

We're all together again, and we'll all be happy together and your son——"

Jacqueline tore herself away from him with a frightened cry and tried to rise.

"Raymond!" she gasped. "Has any one told him? Does he know?"

"No! No! He doesn't know anything yet!" Noel assured her hastily. But the dread of meeting her son and having him know her was too strong. She still struggled to rise, but was too weak.

"Is he here?" she panted. "He mustn't see me! Oh, let me go away! Let me go away!"

She got half-way out of her chair, but fell back exhausted. Dr. Chennel stepped forward and laid a hand on her arm.

"You will be able to go presently, madame," he said, quietly. "Your strength will come back to you shortly."

Jacqueline glanced at him eagerly.

"You are a doctor, aren't you?" she panted.

"Yes," he replied, with a nod. "Don't excite yourself and I'll cure you in a few minutes. You can have perfect confidence in me. I am a friend of your son—a friend of Raymond!"

"Oh! Then—you know——"

"Yes, I know everything," he interrupted, gravely.

"But he will never know, doctor, will he?" she asked, feverishly, gripping his hand.

"No, he shall know nothing at all," he assured.

"Promise me! Promise me!" she cried.

"I promise!" he repeated. She released his hand and sank back with a piteous sob.

"I have nothing left—to me now—but my memories of him," she wept, "and his thoughts of what he believes me to have been. I want him to love me always! Always!—Ah—h—h!"

She closed her eyes and hid her face as the door opened; but it was only Rose with the medicine, on a little tray with a tumbler of water and a teaspoon.

"Quick, Rose, here!" ordered the doctor, sharply. He quickly mixed some of the stimulant with the water and held the tumbler to her lips. She drank a little and presently revived.

"Doctor," she said, faintly. "I believe I'm going to die!"

"Nonsense! Don't be foolish!" laughed the doctor. Rose broke into sobs and Jacqueline recognized her, and the next moment mistress and

maid were in each other's arms. They kissed and wept over each other for a minute or two and then Noel cried lightly:

"There you are! Now let's not have any more nonsense about dying!" While Noel kept up a running fire of pleasant chat in an effort to revive Jacqueline's spirits, Dr. Chennel drew Rose off to one side of the room.

"Where is M. Floriot?" he asked, in a low undertone.

"Just outside—with M. Raymond," replied Rose.

"Tell him not to go away!"

Rose looked up at him quickly and her cheeks paled.

"Do you—think that——" she stopped short. The expression of his eyes gave her the answer.

"Hush!" he whispered. "It is only a question of time—and a short time!"

Rose slipped out and he returned to his patient in time to hear Noel reorganizing her wardrobe, with much laughter, and making plans for a trip to the country. She was smiling faintly, but the smile faded when he made her take some more of the bitter medicine.

"Tastes rather horrible, eh?" he said with a smile, "but you feel better, don't you?"

"Yes, thank you," answered Jacqueline, weakly. "I don't suffer at all. It's my strength—I feel so —weak!"

"Your strength will come back fast enough!" he assured her heartily. "I'll tell you what we'll do! I shall take you to my house in Biarritz! There I can look after you comfortably and easily, and you'll be around in no time!"

"Oh, doctor!" she cried, a grateful catch in her voice. "You are too kind! But it's impossible. I should be in the way."

"Not the least bit in the world!" he replied, briskly. "The house is a big comfortable sort of a barn. I live there all alone, excepting an elderly sister, and she will be only too happy to have you. You'll be with friends there; for, although you don't know it, my sister and I have been your friends for a long time."

"My friends?" she repeated, with a little questioning smile.

"He saved Raymond's life, you know," explained Noel, quickly. The expression of Jacqueline's face altered in a moment to one of unutterable gratitude. She seized his hand and kissed it passionately.

"Doctor, I—I—cannot thank you!" she murmured brokenly.

The doctor gently disengaged his hand and stepped back, turning his face away. The pity of the scene had all but overcome the well-schooled emotions of the man of medicine.

"He and his sister did all they could to console Floriot," whispered Noel; "the poor chap was broken-hearted."

Noel felt the limp figure stiffen at the mention of the hated name.

"Not as broken-hearted as I was!" she exclaimed, bitterly.

"How do you know, Jacqueline? 'Judge not, lest ye be judged,'" he quoted softly.

"I have been judged!" she replied in the same hard undertone. "He drove me out of his house like a dog!"

Noel was silent for a moment; and when he spoke his voice was vibrant with the emotion that the memory of that terrible night awoke.

"I was there that day, Jacqueline, after you had gone," he said. "I saw his grief—and his repentance. I heard him curse his anger and his pride. And since then he—we have searched the world for you. For twenty years he has not had a thought

that was not of you, and in those twenty years he has never known peace or happiness. Ah! Jacqueline, dearest, I believe he has suffered even more than you have!"

"He had his son and I had nobody!" was the bitter reply.

And as if her words had been a call to him, the door was thrown violently open and Raymond dashed headlong into the room.

CHAPTER XXV

"WHILE THE LAMP HOLDS OUT TO BURN —"

When Floriot and Raymond passed out of the little room, the former dropped heavily into one of the big empty armchairs on the bank where the judges had sat a short time before. Raymond gazed at him anxiously. His face was buried in his hands and he made no sound.

"What's the matter, father?" asked the young man, laying his hand on the quivering shoulder. But still his father did not speak. He was trying to nerve himself up to meet the hour that he had dreaded for years. The time for delay was past. He believed that Jacqueline would live only a few hours and he dared not let Raymond's mother die and have him learn afterward that he had been robbed of his one chance to speak to her and know. He felt that Raymond might possibly forgive anything but that.

With an effort he raised his haggard eyes to his son's and took the boy's hand in his.

"My boy," he said, his voice hoarse and trembling with emotion, "I must tell you something unbelievably terrible. I know—how you have loved me and looked up to me—as the sort of man you want to be. When you've heard—what I must tell you now—you will curse God for making me your father!"

"Father!" cried the boy in horror, throwing his arm around his neck. "Father! What——"

But Floriot gently pushed him away and silenced him with a gesture.

"Your mother—is not dead!" he faltered. The words struck the color from Raymond's face and he almost staggered back and stared at his father with terrified eyes.

"Not dead!" he repeated in a dull whisper. Floriot shook his head.

"When you were hardly a year old she left—me!" he said. The boy started forward with a cry that was something between a choke and a sob.

"Wait!" commanded his father, hoarsely. "It was my fault! I didn't know her—I didn't understand her! My neglect drove her to it. She went off with a lover!"

Raymond pressed his hands to his face and

crouched against the broad desk as if the blow had physically crushed him.

"But there is worse than that!" cried Floriot, rising. "She came back to me and begged for forgiveness. She groveled at my feet and pleaded for mercy! She made me see that I shared the blame of her fall! But my cheap, foolish pride conquered every other feeling—every instinct of pity, every impulse of nobility! And I threw her out into the street!"

The boy straightened up with a sob of anguish.

"And—and—what became—of her?" he panted.

Floriot's left hand went up to his throat as if he felt himself choking. He turned his head away, and with a terrible effort raised his other hand, pointed to the door of the President's room and gasped brokenly:

"*She is there! That woman—is—your mother!*"

Raymond swayed on his feet and his father's rigid figure swam in a haze before his eyes. His mother! That woman his mother! In the hundred emotions that swept him in the ghost of a second only one was missing—shame for her stained body and blackened soul. His heart—starved all its life—quivered with a joy that was almost pain at the thought at last it would feel the

love of even such a mother, as the lost and parched wanderer in the desert falls with a prayer of thanksgiving at the edge of a brackish pool.

With a choking cry of "*Mother!*" he stumbled blindly to the door. The instant he rushed into the room, Dr. Chennel and Noel saw what had happened, and the former was in front of him in a stride.

"Be careful!" he warned, in a stern whisper that brought the boy to his senses like a dash of cold water. "Any strong excitement may be too much for her!"

He gripped Raymond's arm and held him until he saw that he had nearly recovered control of himself, and then, with another whisper of "Remember!" he released him.

"Yes, yes! I understand!" exclaimed Raymond in the same tone, holding himself with a mighty effort. "I'll control myself! She sha'n't know!"

Noel was administering a little more of the stimulant as he advanced. He gave Raymond a warning look as, with a gasp of terror, Jacqueline attempted to rise. The young man seemed not to notice her agitation, and with a bright smile he cried:

"Well, my dear client, are you better?"

"Oh, it's nothing!" Dr. Chennel answered for her. "Just a little fit of the nerves which, after all, is quite natural!"

"That's all right!" cried Raymond, heartily. "I didn't want to leave the court without asking how you were."

Her eyes ran hungrily over his graceful but muscular figure, and the pale, handsome face.

"You—are—very good!" she murmured, uncertainly.

Noel signalled the doctor with his eyes, and they went out softly, leaving the door ajar. Raymond briskly pulled a chair up close beside his mother's and went on in the same light tone.

"And I couldn't go without thanking you!" he said. She smiled into his face, but there was still a trace of alarm in her eyes.

"Thanking *me?*" she repeated.

"Of course!" replied Raymond. "Why, I owe my first success to you! To-day has brought me the greatest joy of my life!"

"But if you thank me, what can I say to you?" she asked, her voice trembling with tenderness. He smiled back at her.

"Tell me that you are glad," he suggested. She gazed into his eyes with her heart in hers.

"Yes, I am glad—very glad—almost happy!" she said, in a low, vibrant voice. "But I did not dare hope for the happiness that has come to me to-day!"

Her strength did, indeed, seem to be returned rapidly. Her voice was surer, her eyes sparkled and there was a fleck of color in her cheeks. Raymond felt his lips tremble and he fought with a desire to throw himself into her arms. It was several seconds before he trusted himself to speak. Then:

"I hope I won't tire you," he said, politely. "Before I go, don't you think we might have a little chat? You haven't spoiled me much in that respect, have you?" he added, with a sudden smile. "You are my first client and I hardly know you!"

She reached out and touched his arm in quick apology.

"You must forgive me for having received you so rudely," she said. Raymond laughed.

"You didn't receive me at all, as a matter of fact," he declared. "But I wasn't angry. I said to myself, 'She probably finds me too young, or has no confidence in me, or—or——'" His eyes dropped and in a lower tone he added, "or she doesn't think—she would like me."

He felt a sudden, almost painful pressure on his arm.

"Ah! Don't think that!" she pleaded, quickly. "But I was so sad—so despairingly sad!"

Raymond raised his eyes to her face.

"And now?" he half whispered.

"And now—thanks to you!—I am almost happy!"

"It makes me happy to hear you say so! Do you know," he went on, hitching up his chair in a confidential manner, "I felt the deepest sympathy for you from the first!"

"Really?" she smiled.

"It's a fact!" he declared, with an energetic nod. "From the start; for I was sure you were unhappy, and surer still that you should not have been unhappy. I wanted to console you—to tell you to pluck up your courage—to convince you that I was not only your counsel but your friend—a true and sincere friend!"

"If I had only known—if I had only known!" murmured the woman, with a sharp catch in her voice. It cost Raymond an effort to continue in his bright, boyish tones; but he succeeded.

"I made myself a promise that I would win your case for you," he went on; "that I would work it

out with all my might! As you wouldn't give me your secret, I made up my mind I would guess it, and you see—I succeeded! I made the truth clear, and every heart in the court felt for you. Now you are free!—free to go to the son you love so dearly! Promise me," his voice trembled, "promise me that you will not forget me altogether!"

Her eyes were misty with tears and her face quivered.

"Forget you! Forget you!" she cried, brokenly.

Raymond turned his face away.

"I know I shall always remember you!" he said in a low voice, as one making a sacred vow.

With a half-cry, half-sob she struggled to her feet. He had promised to spare her the pain of knowing that he knew her to be a mother, but even that paled beside the agony of feeling his presence within touch of her hands, and knowing that she must never clasp him to her heart.

"I must go—I must go away!" she panted, feverishly. But before Raymond could rise, her weakened limbs had collapsed and she sank back into her chair.

"And I cannot!" she moaned, her hands pressed to her eyes.

"Please don't go!" he pleaded, laying his hand lightly on her arm. At the touch of his fingers she straightened up with a gasp.

"Before you go," she said, in a piteous half-whisper, "I should like to give you some little trifle as a keepsake, but I have absolutely nothing. But you can be sure that as long as I live—as long—as my heart beats and—my breath lasts—I will never forget you!"

An impulse that he could not resist moved Raymond to reach out and take her fingers in his.

"Give me your hand!" he said. His voice quivered and the woman could feel him tremble. "Do you remember during the trial just now," he went on unsteadily as he slowly bent toward her, "when I turned toward you, you took my hand and pressed it? I—I could feel your eyes—looking into my very heart! I—I—wanted then—to take you in my arms—and press you to my heart!"

Her wild eyes closed and her body was rigid and tense.

"Will you—won't you—won't you kiss me—*mother?*" The words rushed out in a sob as he slid from the chair to his knees by her side.

With a cry that was more than human and strength that was more than a woman's, she flung her arms around his neck, crushed his dark head to her bosom and rained kisses on his eyes and hair and lips and brow. . . .

"Oh, my Raymond! My darling! My darling boy!" she sobbed again and again, and his face was wet with her tears. . . .

"It is too much! Ah, God! I can't stand this joy! My Raymond! My little laddie! . . ."

Minute after minute passed and there was no sound but Jacqueline's quick breathing.

"Are you in pain, mother?" he murmured tenderly, trying to lift his head. He could feel against his cheek that the tumultuous beating of her heart suddenly died away to an unsteady flutter.

"No, no, dear!" she whispered, faintly. "Don't go! Don't move! How—did you—know——?"

"Father just told me, mother mine!" he replied, softly, nestling his head into the hollow where it had not lain for twenty-three years. "He told me all that you had suffered. But it is over now. We'll forget those long years of separation—together!"

Her reply was a long, delicious hug and a dozen

soft kisses. There was another silence. Then Raymond spoke, a little timidly:

"Fath—my father is waiting, mother. Won't you see him?"

She smiled down into his upturned face, but there was a strange dimness in her eyes and his voice sounded far away.

"Yes, yes!" came in a faint whisper. "Tell him—to come—quickly!"

He gave her a long kiss, sprang up and ran out into the courtroom. She half-rose and stretched out her hand for the glass of medicine but could not reach it.

"Raymond!" she tried to call, but her lips barely framed the word. There was a roaring in her ears that might have been the roar of the unknown sea, and a mist before her eyes that might have been the mist upon its waters. . . .

Raymond ran in, closely followed by the three older men.

"Hurry, father! She is waiting!"

He stopped. Something in the position of the still figure in the chair wiped the words from his lips. Dr. Chennel advanced quickly, touched the limp hand and stepped back with bowed head.

Raymond threw himself at her feet with a cry of anguish!

"*Mother! Mother!*

* * * * * * * *

In a little churchyard in the valley of Vienne, not far from the birthplace of the Blessed Maid, you may find a slender column of white marble marked with the name "Floriot" in large letters. Beneath is an inscription which begins:

"Here lies the body of Jacqueline Claire Gilberte Lefevre, the beloved mother of Raymond ——."

"Madame X" had found in death what she had lost in life—love and a name.

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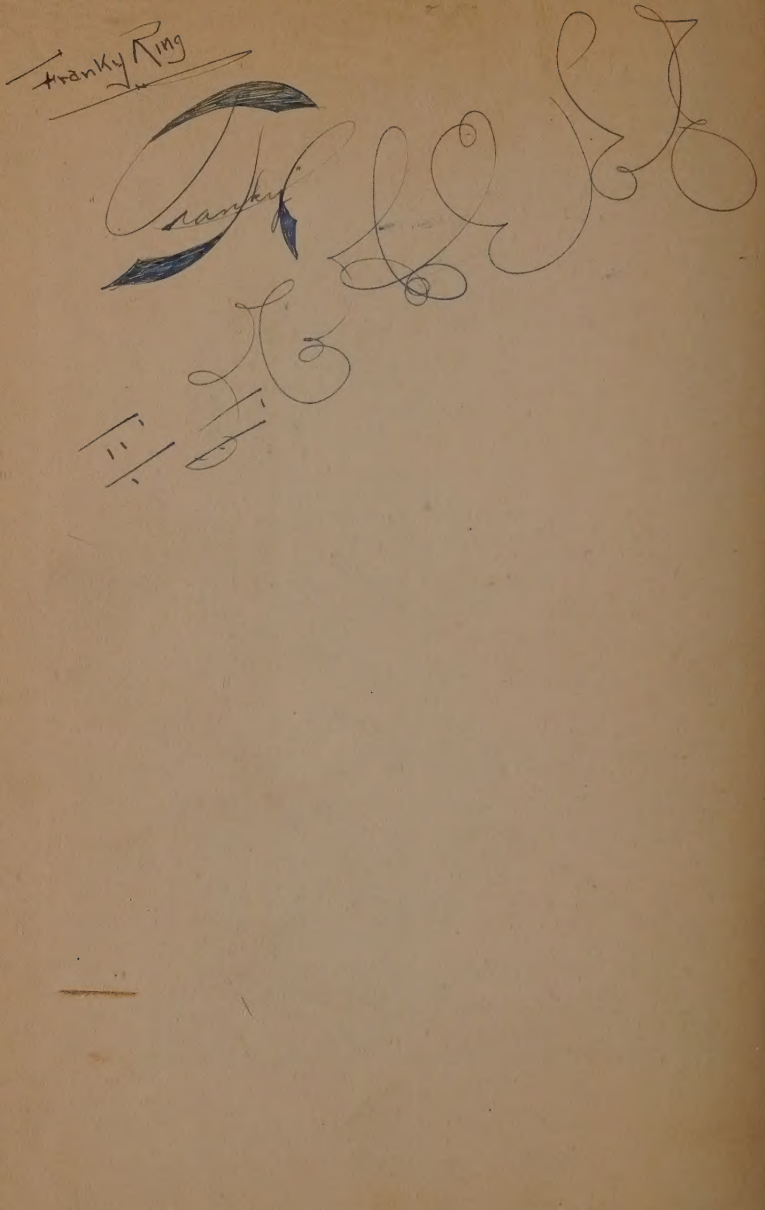
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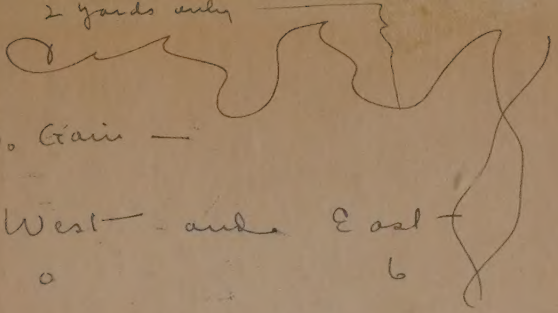

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